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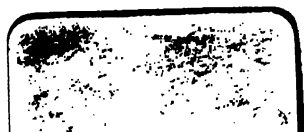
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SAVED BY A WOMAN.

SAVED BY A WOMAN.

A Novel.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "NO APPEAL,"

ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.



VOL. III.

LONDON :

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

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SAVED BY A WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

FOILED AGAIN.

DR. ANDREWS, who had taken his M.D. at Edinburgh, had, some twenty years before, grown tired of his small practice as a physician, at last obtained employment as a surgeon in the navy, and seen active service in many parts of the world. In due time he retired on half-pay, and coming back to his native town of Lipscombe just in time to step into the shoes of old Dummer, the parish surgeon, had settled down there, and acquired the good-will of all classes by his common sense, straightforwardness, and

kindly disposition. He was now a bright, cheery, old bachelor, and a great friend of the Captain's, on board whose ship he had served during her last voyage to the West Indies. Many a fair damsel and steady matron in Lipscombe had set her cap at the Doctor ; but as yet in vain. Mammas had enlarged upon his desolate condition in the long winter evenings ; and papas had held serious converse with him after dinner on the cosy comforts of the marriage-state. But still Andrews remained a bachelor.

“ Surely,” he said to himself, “ in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird, much less a tough old weather-beaten doctor like me.”

And, so, by degrees his friends gave him up as hopeless and incorrigible ; and his enemies as not worth any further expenditure of time and labour.

He will be caught, said these latter, caught at last by some saucy miss in her

teens, who will rule him with a rod of iron ; and so they often told him.

"If I am caught," said the Doctor to his old friend and ally, the Captain, "I shall deserve to be broken in pieces like a potter's vessel."

Not that he meant to be profane in these quotations ; for a more devout or upright man never attended the parish church, than Dr. Andrews. But, as the Vicar often reminded him, he had got into such a trick of quoting sacred words, that he hardly knew when he used them.

"It's not my fault, Vicar," he would say, "but entirely owing to there being a chaplain on board the *Sea-Gull* on a three years' cruise. He did nothing but spout texts ; texts for dry weather, and texts for damp ; texts when the sailors used naughty language ; and texts when they touched their hats to his reverence ; texts when the first 'Luff' got drunk, and texts when the Cap-

tain said his prayers in a dialect not known to the Churches. How could I escape being saturated with texts, frontlets between my eyes, and——”

“Dr. Andrews,” interrupts the Vicar, “you are a very profane and improper person for a churchwarden, and at Christmas next I shall certainly look out for a more discreet and godly man among my parishioners.”

But many a Christmas came without bringing that more discreet person. Regularly, Sunday by Sunday, was the Doctor to be found in his place ; as loud and vigorous in his responses as the Captain himself, and as grave as the Vicar, whose churchwarden he had been for so many a year.

He sat near the Captain in the middle aisle, and the two cronies after service often walked home together, as far as their way lay in the same direction.

One Sunday morning, however, not long

after the events of the last chapter, Langley missed his old friend from his accustomed place, and looked in vain for him among the surrounding congregation. The service went on as usual, in spite of the churchwarden's absence, and the Captain's wandering glances, until at the end of a long list of banns of marriage the Vicar came to the words—

*Also, between Henry Fairleigh, Bachelor,
and*

*Hester Langley, Spinster, both of this
Parish,*

For the Third Time of asking.

When a loud voice, somewhere at the end of the church, suddenly exclaimed, "*I forbid the banns!*"

Thereupon, for a few seconds, a strange and terrible silence spread throughout the church, and everybody seemed aghast at the interruption, until, in a clear, steady voice, the Vicar replied to the unknown accuser, "Come to me after service in the vestry."

Never did a morning service seem so long, never so wearisome both to shepherd and his flock, as on that day. But it ended at last, the benediction was given, and after a few minutes of wondering delay the people began to leave the church, whispering as they went, and breaking up into groups in the churchyard outside, until the Captain alone remained ; and he still standing, as if petrified, in his pew.

Nobody seemed to know who the stranger was, or what had become of him. He certainly had not entered the vestry through the church, nor had the Vicar come out.

The fact was, that the forbidding of banns had slipped away out of the church almost unseen, at the very instant of the service closing, and gone round to the Vicar's entrance behind the chancel.

"It was a young fellow in a sailor's dress," said one.

"No, no," replied Miss Pratt to a knot of

inquiring friends, "I was close at hand, and saw him as plainly as I now see the church tower. He wore a rough pilot coat, and yellow trousers, had red hair, and a green stock."

However that might have been, he was (unknown to them) at that very moment in the vestry, where the following dialogue went briskly on.

"Are you then the person who forbade the banns between Mr. Fairleigh and Miss Hester Langley?"

"Yes, I am."

"And has this other person with you anything to do with the business?" added the Vicar, glancing, as he spoke, at a young man with red hair, who had entered with the new comer."

"He is merely my friend, and I should prefer—"

"Pardon me," said the Vicar, "it is what I prefer. This is my vestry, and I can dis-

pense with his company. Whatever you may have to say is a matter for my private ear, for the present at all events. I will, therefore, open the door for your friend to retire and await your return in the churchyard, as he is clearly in the way here."

All this was said in such a quiet, firm, tone of authority as to admit of no reply. Mr. Richard Rogers walked with a cheerful smile on his face into the churchyard; the vestry door was closed and locked, and the Vicar once more turned to his work of questioning, with a cold disdain in his manner, which did not at all re-assure his visitor.

"Now, sir," he said, "I am ready to hear who you are, and what you have to say?"

"I did not come here," was the sulky answer, "to answer a string of questions, and I can't see what my name has to do with the matter at all."

"Then I will tell you. You have thought proper to forbid the marriage of two of my

parishioners, in the middle of Divine Service, when any undue interruption of that kind may amount to brawling, for which I, as a magistrate, can commit you to the stocks, if my churchwarden gives you in charge—as I dare say he will. If you had any right or reason to act as you did, I must first know who you are.”

“My name is Thomas Russell, and I forbade the banns because the man is the son of a convicted felon, and not fit to marry a decent woman.”

At this charge the Vicar paused for a moment, as if in amazement ; but recovering himself, said,—

“*Mr. Fairleigh the son of a felon ?* What proof do you bring of this astounding charge ? for, as you must be well aware, your single word cannot sustain it. Do you make it from your own personal knowledge, or from mere hearsay ? ”

In reply to this query Russell, in a some-

what fierce and angry manner, recounted the story already known to the reader.

"There," he added, "if you want proof, I should think that is enough for you."

"Pardon me, Mr. Russell, such a story as this is of no value whatever as evidence. It may possibly be true, but for all I know, it may be false from beginning to end. In any case, if you have not clear and ready proof at hand, and cannot show me by what authority you interfere in the matter at all, I am only wasting my time in listening to you any longer. Indeed, if you have nothing more to add to your story, you may think yourself well off to escape without being indicted for brawling by Dr. Andrews, my churchwarden, or by Mr. Fairleigh himself for slander, if he thinks it worth while to treat you with anything but contempt!"

At this moment there was a loud knock at the outer door, which the Vicar opened to admit Andrews and his friend the Cap-

tain, now apparently in a high state of wrath.

"Is this the fellow," he exclaimed, "who forbade my daughter's marriage? because, if so, my dear Vicar, I know the whole trumpery story already, and believe it to be a pack of lies from first to last. He has no right whatever to speak on the lady's behalf; and as her father, I assure you that the marriage has my full consent, whatever other string of falsehoods the scoundrel may have ready to trump up against Mr. Fairleigh."

"And I," said the churchwarden, "must beg him to carry his brawling elsewhere, or he may find that I carry too many guns for him, and know how to use them. 'Lying lips,'" he added, abruptly, "'are an abomination' both to God and men."

Under these circumstances, there was nothing for Mr. Thomas Russell to do but to vacate the field, and leave it in entire pos-

session of the enemy, which he did in grim and sulky silence at first, and then with muttered threats of vengeance against the whole party, as he made his exit into the churchyard, and rejoined his friend Dick Rogers.

"You mean, then," said the Vicar to Langley, "to take no further notice of this idle vagabond's story? Well, I think you are right. It is clearly a case of mere malicious slander; and the best thing you can do is to let it die out, as such a nine days' wonder will always die, if let alone."

In the justice of this view, the Captain and his old friend could scarcely help concurring; and so, after a few minutes' further talk, both set out on their way homewards, discussing what had happened as they went with no small energy and merriment, rather as a good joke than otherwise.

"By Jupiter!" said the Doctor, at last, "if I thought that that poor fool, Dick

Rogers, had anything to do with this business, he should never come into my surgery again. But, as the Vicar put it, Langley, what can you expect from a fellow with red hair and an emerald green stock ?”

“Red or green,” replies the Captain, “he had better stick to his rhubarb and magnesia, and leave that other son of a sea-cook to spin his own yarn of lies elsewhere. The lubbers ! they both want a day’s mast-heading, or a good round dozen from the boat-swain’s mate. But I missed you in church, Andrews, this morning—where were you ?”

“I have been forced to give up my old seat, Langley, and go back under the gallery, out of sight of little Dan Cooper, the tailor.”

“What—the poor old cripple with the wen in his neck ?”

“My dear fellow, if he had sat there another Sunday, I am sure I should certainly have laid hands on him. But there

he planted himself week after week, week after week, not two yards away, with that splendid wen exactly opposite to me—*actually within reach!* And, of course, all through the service there was I planning and planning over and over, again and again, the whole operation. I saw it all to a T. It would have been as beautiful a thing as was ever done; and so I told Cooper every time I met the fellow. But, bless you, the poor beggar hasn't got a grain of love for science in him. He would not listen to a word. I might as well have talked to the goose on his shopboard. So there was nothing for it at last but a seat under the gallery. He was not safe for another Sunday. My love to Miss Hester, Captain, and say I wish her all sorts of good things, and expect to be asked to the breakfast. As for all this mess about the banns, send the whole thing to Jericho, or to Cheeks the Marine. Dick Rogers I'll look to myself. Only one word

more : does Fairleigh know anything of this idle vagabond's story ? ”

“ Nothing, I believe, as yet ; and, besides, he is away from home. But now, of course, the whole parish will know it.”

“ Not from me,” replied the Doctor, “ nor from the Vicar, I am sure, nor from you, I suppose ? Better let the whole thing rest as it is.”

And with this the friends parted at the cross-roads.

As luck would have it, Fairleigh was away from home at this time, away in Exeter in quest of some final marriage gifts ; and the two young ladies, as is usual in such cases, had gone to another church until the banns had been duly published. So that neither party, as yet, knew what had happened on that eventful Sunday morning. For the present the Captain had taken his old friend's advice, and resolved to say nothing outside the Rosery of the two “ lub-

bers" who deserved the delicate attentions of the boatswain's mate.

But for all that, as Dr. Andrews remarked, a "bird of the air seemed to tell the matter" to the whole parish, with the exception of the people most concerned to hear it.

Mrs. Gingham was full of it, even if afraid to mention it to Miss Fairleigh; Cudlip, the barber, mentioned it in strictest confidence to some only of his select customers; Sam Roper got to hear a distorted account of it, which he dared not put in the *Gazette*; and old Betty at the Rosery declared it was "all a pack of nasty crams" before she had heard more than a single sentence of what some tea-drinking gossip came to tell her; and so, as it were, between the two lights of truth and falsehood, the story hovered to and fro over the fields of scandal, nobody hearing less of it than the chief actors in the little drama on that Sunday morning. This

was the state of things when Fairleigh himself set out on his return from Exeter, laden with wedding gifts, and looking forward brightly to *the* day, now close at hand.

CHAPTER II.

DREAMS.

THE scene of our little story floats hither and thither, as its varying lights and shadows require ; but we feel strongly that poor Hester has been rather neglected of late. In truth, she is just now too happy to require much notice. The old dream of her youth, as she now calls it, in thought, has been silently broken up ; and other dreams of a truer and more lasting kind have taken its place.

The handsome young sailor who once rambled with her through the woods of Lipscombe, and in his gay fashion half won her girlish heart ; who flirted with Jennie Moreton, and every other fair damsel that fell in

his way ; who had dared to kiss Hester herself, as well as that rosy-faced girl at Dingle Farm, about whom she had inquired of the old gipsy-woman, and whose voice had at one time been more to her

“Than music in its sweetest key,”

had now become all but a thing of the past. His very name was full of pain, as she thought of it. He had behaved to her with insolence and ingratitude. And yet, with all these painful associations, though she cared nothing for him now, it was impossible to forget that he had been once dear to her, and some faint rays of light, the light of her past love, lingered round him still.

Looking back, therefore, her dream was of a sombre cast ; but looking onward, the vision was fair, and bright enough to atone for all the cloudy past. The purple glow of first love had died out, but a steadier light had filled all the sky, and promised to remain.

Romance had given way to reality ; not a reality of mere hard, bare, fact, but of facts crowned with a happy light of their own, which she believed nothing could ever diminish or cloud. She loved, and was loved by, a man worthy of all her heart could give. Every day, as it passed, brought her fresh assurance of her happiness. The single word, "Love," had unlocked to her a whole world of magic beauty. She breathed a new air, and entering unconsciously on a new phase of existence, found out the truth, as well as the beauty, of the poet's words—

" All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
All are but ministers of love,
And feed his sacred flame.

" And hopes and fears that kindle hope,
An undistinguishable throng,
And gentle wishes long subdued,
Subdued and cherished long."

Fear, indeed, had now little to do with her dream of the future, but, and as it served

to rekindle her hopes ; and the greatest joy to her was that all at the Rosery seemed as happy as herself. Her father was in a state of boisterous happiness unknown to him for many a long year. Old Betty prophesied nothing but good. Jennie Moreton teased her, it is true, now and then ; but it was banter of the brightest and most sunny kind, and fed the very fire which it pretended to make light of. While as for Jack, the terrier, he knew the very step on the gravelled path, and the click of the gate, that sent her flying down the garden to meet them, almost as well as she did herself. Jack, at first, had seemed to distrust the new visitor, sniffed gravely at his stick and gloves in the hall, and was cautious in the matter of tail-shaking. But this gleam of doubt had passed away, and the whole household now welcomed Fairleigh's appearance with a hearty welcome.

Nor were Fairleigh's own visions less full

of bright promise. He had reached a time of life, when, if men truly love, they do so with mind as much as with heart. It is not merely a passion that masters them, and hurries them into alternate snatches of bliss and despair,—but a controlling, guiding, influence, that, with steady power, raises the whole man into new being, kindles every power with fresh energy, and ennobles every aim in life. Henceforward, he toiled, thought, planned, and spoke, not for himself, but for the woman whom he loved. It was a less selfish, and therefore a truer devotion than that of hot youth ; and the fruit it yielded was more noble and more lasting. For many long years he had worked patiently on at his profession, and won an honourable independence ; looking forward calmly to a happy old age among his books, content with the companion who had shared with him the darker days of poverty, and the sudden gift of affluence. Now, his whole

horizon was widened, and though he regretted his sister's determination to leave him, the act was hers and not his ; and she scarcely entered into his future at all. If she and Hester could have been together, he would have been well content ; but the future mistress of the Manor-house was enough and far more than enough, to fulfil his loftiest ideal. It was for her that his life was now to be spent, and in her happiness was to be found his own. On her account, he rejoiced that wealth was his, that he had a goodly home : books, flowers, and all that seemed likely to brighten her fair young life.

CHAPTER III.

REALITIES.

THIS was the state of things when Fairleigh came back from Exeter, radiant with hope; and the day fixed for the wedding drew near. Miss Fairleigh had taken up her abode at the bailiff's cottage, declining to be present at the marriage, and devoting herself, as she said, to the offering up of those prayers which she deemed necessary for her brother's unfortunate condition.

"If," she remarked, "the lady had been of a suitable age and character, things might have been different; she had no wish but for her brother's welfare; but as to a young, flighty, designing person, like Miss Langley, it was impossible to recognise her in any way."

Bridegroom and bride, however, received this edict with calmness, and all preparations went on as vigorously as if they had received the old lady's unqualified approval.

Both Hester and Jennie had by this time heard from the Captain of all that had taken place on the Sunday when the banns were forbidden, and though they received the news in rather a different spirit, both seemed to think it not for them to comment on the intelligence, while Mr. Fairleigh himself said nothing, and their informant treated the whole matter as a joke. Fairleigh was silent, simply because he had heard nothing of what had happened; and Cudlip had held his tongue before him, for the plain reason that such a topic was clearly one which he had better allow to his patron to inaugurate, or to leave untouched, as he thought best. Whether Miss Fairleigh was really aware of the terrible scandal was uncertain; at all events,

she said nothing ; and, indeed, to use her own words, "she had washed her hands of the whole affair !"

On the day before that fixed for the wedding, Hester and her lover had returned from a long ramble in the Lipscombe woods, and were parting at the garden-gate, when the Captain hailed his old friend, and begged him to come in.

"Come in, Fairleigh," he cried ; "and smoke one last pipe while you are a free man. After to-morrow, you know, you will be under strict orders ; and I shall see nothing of you for months, even if tobacco is allowed at all."

He needed no pressing to accept the invitation ; and although Hester protested that such a visit was altogether contrary to the strict laws of etiquette, an hour more with her lover was far too pleasant to be lost on that account. It was a fine winter afternoon, and while the two smokers took

refuge in the arbour, and talked over their future plans, she herself found employment close at hand among some early snow-drops and crocuses, just peeping above the frosty ground. All at once, however, in the lane which skirted the garden, hasty steps were heard descending the hill; then came a burst of loud and angry voices, and the sudden report of a gun; followed by fresh outcries and sounds of a violent altercation.

Fairleigh and the old man at once jumped to their feet, and rushed down to the gate, close to which the scuffle had been going on, and was just now come to a sudden pause. Two young men, with torn and muddy clothes, and one of them covered with blood, were standing in front of one of Fairleigh's keepers, who had found them trespassing in the woods, and now demanded that the gun of one of them should be given up.

"This fellow, sir," he said to his master,

"have got a licence," pointing as he spoke to Russell ; " and he may go, if he ain't too drunk ; but the other chap has been skulking about the woods for days past without one ; and I a'nt going to let he go."

" All right, Sam," replied Fairleigh ; " but never mind guns or licence just now ; you know *him* well enough, and can hunt him up to-morrow ; but this other man is covered with blood, and must be seen to at once. He can hardly stand now ; so, lend a hand, and help him into the house."

Russell, who in spite of being half-tipsy, was, indeed, faint with loss of blood, at first sullenly and stubbornly refused to stir, but at last was compelled by sheer exhaustion to lean on the keeper's arm, and be led into the house, where, under old Betty's superintendence, they got him laid out on a sofa, while Sam was despatched for Dr. Andrews.

" Take the pony-carriage," said his

master, at the Manor-house ; “drive into Lipscombe ; wait for the Doctor, and bring him here as fast as the ponies can go.”

Russell's friend had been, to their great joy, sent about his business, after a strong caution from the lord of the manor ; but, meanwhile, all that could be done for the wounded man was to cut open and remove the sleeve of his coat, wash the wounded arm, and revive him now and then with doses of brandy. He had fainted soon after being laid out on a sofa ; and as Jennie Moreton happened to be away in Lipscombe, Hester and old Betty were his nurses ; and there was nothing more to be done but to wait for the Doctor's arrival.

The gun, it seems, had gone off by accident, as Russell was endeavouring to help one of his companions to escape from the keeper by climbing through a hedge ; and the contents had lodged in his right arm, apparently shattering the wrist, which could

neither be moved nor touched without great pain.

By degrees, the wounded man began to revive, at last to recognise faces, and then to remember where he was. At this, his temper, which had been bitter enough before, suddenly grew even more sulky and more morose than ever. He grumbled at old Betty, and growled at Hester, as they waited upon him; was barely civil to the master of the house, and swore angrily at Fairleigh, if he had but dared to address him.

"Let me go," he said at last; "I am quite well now, and can find my way back to Lipscombe right enough. I don't want anything more to do with this fellow, nor he with me. He has no business to be in this house, as I told that fool of a parson on the Sunday, though he wouldn't believe me."

"What did you tell the fool of a parson

on the Sunday?" quietly asked Fairleigh, stepping forward at these words. "What did you tell the fool of a parson, if I might ask?"

"What did I tell him? Why, that you were the son of a convicted felon, and not fit to marry into a decent man's family. That's what I told him, though the fool wouldn't believe me. Perhaps, he thought you *were* good enough to be the Captain's son-in-law, after all."

At these words, a terrible silence fell upon the whole group. The wounded man threw himself back, exhausted, on the couch. Terror-stricken, old Betty slipped out of the room. Hester turned pale in utter dismay, half-dreading, half-rejoicing, that now, at last, things must be cleared up.

But, to her amazement, her lover, in reply to this terrible accusation, uttered not a single word. He stood silent, as if aghast, and absently gazed out of the window.

It was the Captain who first spoke, and his words were hurried and impatient.

“As far as I am concerned, Mr. Fairleigh, don’t, I beg, take any further notice of this drunken fellow’s budget of lies. He has been retailing it all over the parish for months past ; and, not long ago, as he told you, at the parish church. He has tried it on upon me, and upon my daughter, and we scout the whole thing—as Andrews and the Vicar did—as worthless. You have but to say that the whole story is a piece of false slander, and come away with us into the other room, until the Doctor arrives. Leave this fellow to his own devices, and let him growl out to Betty what else he has to say. It can scarcely be worth your hearing, and I am sure it’s not worth Hester’s or mine. Come along with us, Fairleigh.”

But, to the Captain’s great surprise, Fairleigh showed no inclination whatever to accede to this view of matters at all.

At first he made no answer whatever, but walked again in an absent manner to the window, and gazed idly out upon the bare and wintry branches of the neighbouring copse, and the dreary sky, as if they had some special message for him. Then, suddenly, he turned and said in a slow, distinct, voice,—

“Thanks—many thanks, my friend, for your kindly words, and your, as well as Miss Hester’s, trust in me. But, however worthless this fellow may be, I think I had better speak to him alone—for a few minutes, alone.”

The old man and his daughter, therefore, still lost in wonder, quitted the room, and the wounded man and his companion were left to themselves.

For a few minutes a low and hurried conversation ensued, but this was suddenly put an end to by the arrival of the doctor, whom Sam, the keeper, had met on his way

to the Manor-house, and thus managed to secure without delay.

"Well, Fairleigh," said a cheery voice, "somebody's been in the wars, I understand, and I am glad to see that it's not you."

"There he lies, doctor, and, as far as I can make out, really in need of the healing art. Look carefully to him," he added in a whisper, "and don't forget that in this case I am paymaster. Good-night; I shall only be in your way here, and will be off as soon as I have sent old Betty to your help."

Then Mr. Fairleigh took his hat and coat from a neighbouring chair, where they had been flung down in haste, went quietly out of the house round to the back entrance, gave his message to Betty in person, and made his way quickly towards home.

Half an hour later, when Dr. Andrews had done all he could for the wounded man, he naturally expressed his surprise at not seeing

the master of the house, or either of the ladies.

"Miss Jennie is away shopping, I believe," said Betty, "up to Church Town; but the Captain was in the house five minutes ago, doctor, and Miss Hester too. Shall I let 'em know?"

"By all means, Betty; I have a word to say to them before I go. But stay, I shall find them in the dining-room, I suppose? I know my way."

"Well, doctor," exclaimed Langley, as the doctor entered the room, "what about this fellow Russell?"

"He has had a narrow chance of blowing his hand off, that's all; but may be all right again in a fortnight, or so. Rather a nice case, though; and I shall be curious to see if he recovers the full use of his fingers. The shot have cut through some of the tendons I think; but if he is quiet, and well looked after, Nature may set him all right again,—

though the dog hardly deserves it. You may safely get rid of him at once ; and I may as well take him back in my own carriage to Lipscombe."

"So far, so good, Andrews ; but where on earth is Fairleigh all this time ?"

"Fairleigh ?—I only said five words to him, and then he was off in a furious hurry, —busy enough, I suppose, before to-morrow. He had had enough, I fancy, of that fellow's company before I came."

"Gone !" exclaimed the Captain,—“ gone without a single word ?”

"Yes, gone, beyond a doubt, Langley ; as I must be doing to my other patients. So come along, and lend me a hand with old Betty to get this fellow into the carriage. Good-night, Miss Hester. You must be wishing me at Jericho all this time. God bless you with sunshine to-morrow, and for many a year to come ; for you both deserve it. Your cheeks must wear red roses then,

instead of the white ones I see now. Good-bye. The Captain must explain all this story of the wounded man some other day."

To these kindly words Hester made no reply. What answer, indeed, could she make? How could she tell her old friend that tomorrow was doomed, as far as she could see, to be a day of misery and blighted hope?

In five minutes Mr. Tom Russell and the cheery old doctor, side by side, were on their way to Lipscombe; and the Captain and his daughter were left to ponder as they might on the strange events of the day.

"Mr. Roper," said Andrews, as he led his patient into the little man's snug parlour, in the High Street, "I have brought you a wounded man; but how, when, or where he got into this pickle, I must leave you to find out for yourself. I can get nothing out of him but curses against a better man than himself, and a string of abuse about the world in general. I will call and see him in

the morning. All he wants now is a good light supper and sleep ; and a better temper, if you can lay hands on it,—a worse one you won't find this side of Exeter."

But Roper fared no better than the doctor at Russell's hands. The sick man would say nothing as to his wound, or the events of the day, and after supper went still more sulkily to bed.

At the Rosery all was perplexity and dismay. Jennie Moreton had returned from her shopping, and gathered what little news she could from old Betty and Hester, but this little only served to increase her desire to hear more.

"All I know is," said Hester, "that he was brought in here covered with blood ; and that he made this infamous charge face to face against Mr. Fairleigh, who either could not or would not deny it."

As for the old man himself, he sat by the fire, and smoked in moody silence, still un-

willing to believe what seemed to be the bitter truth, and yet seeing no way of escape from it.

"If Andrews," he said, "had not been in such a confounded hurry, we might have had it fairly out with the fellow."

But the doctor was miles away by this time, and busy with other patients; while Fairleigh himself had suddenly gone off in this unaccountable fashion, just when "an innocent man," as Jennie remarked, "would have stayed and explained the whole affair."

The hours passed wearily away, until at last ten o'clock came; the Captain, in rather a troubled voice, read prayers, according to his usual custom, and all hands prepared to part for the night.

Not a word was said by any of the party of the morrow—the wedding-day—for no one knew what to say. It was a dark and terrible mystery which had fallen on them; and their bright dream of happiness seemed

utterly blotted out. The morrow must come. Sufficient unto the day would be the evil!

"God bless you, Hessy, child," said the old man, as he tenderly kissed her, "and give us all strength to bear it bravely, till He sees fit to clear up this wretched business. For believe it I *cannot*, even now. Dry your eyes, darling, and be off to Blanket Bay. Sleep will do wonders for you."

The two girls parted, too, after a loving kiss; not for their usual, final, gossip upstairs, but, almost in silence, each going sadly enough to her own room.

As to sleep, she might as well try to fly; and that Hester knew well enough, as the crowd of anxious, bitter, thoughts fell on her weary brain; and she paced up and down her room in restless perplexity.

There lay her wedding-dress, decked with lace and flowers; there were all his marriage-gifts, books, and trinkets; on her finger was the ring he had placed there; she remem-

bered the very spot in the wood where he had put it on, and the happy kiss she gave him in exchange for his. In her heart was the image of the man who had won it, whom she loved and honoured. And was she to believe that this man, whom she had known so long, and who had proved himself so true, so noble, so generous, was unworthy of her love, a mere adventurer who had fled away from the house at the first sound of the charge brought against him, without a word of explanation ?

It seemed impossible not to believe this ; but, at the next, to believe it was harder still.

“ No,” she whispered to herself, at last, “ I will *not* believe it till he tells me it is true.” And then, fairly worn out by the weary conflict with these idle speculations, she undressed, and, though sleep was out of the question, lay down on the bed, as chime after chime sounded from the distant church tower. Would morning never come ?

How long a time thus passed she knew not, but it seemed of intolerable length, until the silence of the night was suddenly broken by the sound of horse-hoofs in the lane, hasty steps in the garden, and a sudden and furious ring at the bell of the front door. After a few minutes, she heard her father go slowly down and unchain the door. Then followed a few hurried words ; the door was shut, and again secured ; the hasty steps re-crossed the garden, the horseman galloped away up the steep lane ; and once more silence and sorrow filled the house. She listened intently, but for a time could hear nothing. She struck a light, and looked at her watch. After all, she had been watching little more than an hour. It was, even now, barely half-past eleven ; though the events of the day seemed a year ago.

Presently steps ascended the stairs softly, and a knock sounded at her own door.

"Not asleep yet, Hessy, child!" said her father; "may I come in?"

"Yes, yes, come in, papa; you have got some news for me, I know."

Half dressed, and with a pale and haggard face, he came up to her bedside, with a letter in his hand.

"Tell me all, at once," she cried—"all. No concealment."

"No news, Hessy, no news," he answered; "only the miserable truth, that this drunken scoundrel told us to-night; his cursed budget is no lie, it seems, after all. Fairleigh owns it himself, in a letter to me. And this, I suppose," handing her a letter addressed to herself, "is only to tell you the same thing. I had a long fight with myself, as to whether you should have it to-night or not; but he implored me so earnestly, that at last I gave way. Read it, child, and let me be gone. It cannot be worse than mine, or make things blacker."

"No, no," she answered, in a slow, trembling voice; "I cannot open and read it yet. I must be alone. To-morrow you shall see and know all."

He saw at once that she was terribly in earnest, and without another word slowly left the room, only kissing her once more, and saying—

"So be it, my darling; God help us both!"

She listened to the old man's steps as he went back to his own room, and then rising quickly, and having locked the door, she began to dress, the letter still lying unopened on her table.

Meanwhile, we must follow the Captain. He has wandered down into the sitting-room, and is standing by the empty, fireless, grate; once more reading the fatal letter, by the light of the little ship's lamp which he had caught up in his first alarm. This is what he reads :—

"My dear Captain Langley,

"You were amazed, no doubt, to-day, at my leaving you without a word of explanation; and, even now, I do not write to supply what I then omitted. But the charge which you heard—and it seems the whole parish has in some way heard—made against me is a true one. The time will, I hope, come when I may offer to you the explanation which I cannot offer now.

"To your daughter I have written as plainly in the enclosed letter, which—as you once believed in and trusted me—I earnestly implore you to give to her without a moment's delay.

"Faithfully yours,

"H. FAIRLEIGH."

He reads it over and over again, in a sort of dull bewilderment; but in reality can make nothing of the words which he has

not already made a dozen times over. His intended son-in-law is neither more nor less than an adventurer; and when to-morrow comes, he, Captain Langley, will be the laughing-stock or the pity of the whole neighbourhood. This, and only this, is the sum and substance of all his cogitation, look at the matter as he may.

Alone there, in the dingy, cold room, long before the first tinge of morning light shows itself over the hills, the old man falls down on his knees, and prays for his child, that God will give her grace and courage to bear the blow that is coming upon her; and himself—well, for himself, strength to keep and comfort her, and fight out the battle to the last.

Then he puts on a thick greatcoat over his dressing-gown; and marches up and down the room, quarter-deck fashion, smoking a quiet, solemn, pipe as he goes.

“Written *plainly* to Hester!” he says at

last ; "what an old fool I was not to see that word ! Of course, he has told her all about it, and leaves her to tell me. By Jupiter ! what a fool I am. Of course, I must see her at once."

But when he had gone half-a-dozen steps down the passage towards his daughter's room, he had come to a totally different conclusion. "She has read all he has to say long before this ; and if there was anything worth telling, I should have heard it by this time, beyond a doubt."

Back, therefore, he goes to his quarter-deck exercise.

Meanwhile, overhead, Jennie Moreton, awake and on the watch from the very first, has crept into Hester's room, to inquire as to the meaning of the sudden arrival at the Rosery.

"It was bright moonlight, Hessy, and I saw him quite clearly. It was Mr. Fairleigh himself. He tied his horse to the

gate, and came across the grass to the front door. What did he come for ? ”

She had found Hester standing, dressed, near the table, with an open letter in her hand, a bright flush on her cheek, and a wild sparkle in her eye, that were hard to understand at first sight, but told clearly of the struggle that had been going on.

“ I have read it over twenty times, Jennie, in utter despair. But now, all at once, I see the meaning of it ; if you are sure that it was Mr. Fairleigh himself that brought it ? ”

“ Quite sure, Hessy, quite sure ; and may I look at the letter now ? Remember, I am starving for news ! ”

“ Not yet, Jennie ; not a single line of it yet. You must go back to your own room this minute, my dear, while I answer the letter ; and in less than half an hour I will come to you ; you shall see the letter,

and tell me what you think of my reply. Only, go at once."

Go, therefore, she did, slowly and reluctantly, and more puzzled than ever. In another minute Hester was alone once more. She looked at her watch, saw that it was just a minute or two after midnight, then lighted a couple of small tapers, and placed one on each side of her dressing-table, close to the window. There they burned steadily for exactly five minutes, when she extinguished both them and her own candle ; and sitting down in an easy-chair by her fire, which had not even yet gone out, paused awhile to think of what she had done. As she sat and listened, she heard, far away in the distance, the faint echo of a horse's hoofs again on a rocky road. Tears filled her eyes at the sound, but joy was in her heart ; and it was with no uncertain step that she made her way down to Jen-

nie's room, though it was through thick darkness.

"There, Jennie, read that, my dear,—and you will see that all is not lost, even now."

So saying, she put into her cousin's hands the following letter :—

" Hester Langley,

" Can you still believe in, and trust to, the Felon's Son,—in spite of all that has happened to-day.

" If you can trust him, at twelve o'clock to-night set two tapers alight at your window, and let them burn for five minutes. I could trust YOU, were the clouds a thousand times as thick.

" H. F."

" And what answer did you make, Hesty, to this brief epistle,—which to me seems as much a riddle as all that has happened to-day ? "

“Do, Jennie? What *could* I do but light the two tapers, and watch them for their five minutes exact? And the very instant their flame shone upon the window, a conviction flashed into my heart that I was right in trusting him, come what may, come what will. Jennie dear,” she cried in a passion of tears, “what can I do but believe? I love him, Jennie,—love him with all my heart and all my soul.”

“There can be no love, Hessy, without trust,—trust perfect and entire. I cannot see my way out of this horrible darkness; but if you can, thank God that it is so,—and let us try to breathe a ray of hope into your father’s heart. He is down in his own room,—I heard him pacing to and fro there; let us go to him at once.”

Still pacing to and fro, they found the old man, with the same hopeless, weary, look stamped upon his face.

He listened gravely to all they had to say, but seemed to derive from it neither comfort nor hope.

He even read the letter which Hester brought to him,—more than once,—but looked upon it with no greater favour than on his own. .

“ They both tell pretty much the same story, child,” he said at last ; “ whether you believe in them well enough to light candles or not. It seems to me plain enough that this drunken fellow spoke the truth,—and Fairleigh himself admits it. And to-morrow we shall be the laughing-stock of the whole parish. How can you trust the man, in the face of all this witness against him, and in spite of his own words ? ”

“ Simply because he asks me to trust him. I know him well enough to be sure he would never do this, if he ever had been false to us, or meant to be so now. How or when the truth will come out I know

not, but come it will, sooner or later,—as surely as dawn follows this dreary, dreary, night.”

“ God forbid, child, that I should destroy your loving trust, if it’s of any comfort to you ; for comfort you need beyond any one of us.”

And, with this, the Captain resumed his march ; and not a word more could be got from him.

The two girls set about some household work. Old Betty in her lonely attic somehow caught the infection, and came down into the kitchen, where a cheery fire soon blazed, and she got ready a cup of “ tay,” her infallible remedy for all cases of distress, bodily or mental.

“ Get the Captain, my dear,” she said, “ to ate a mossel of something, and take a drink of tay, and lave off that there marchin’ up and down like a Polar bear ; that’s enough to worrit his brains into a regular muddle. As

for Mr. Fairleigh, he's as true as steel, I warrant."

"God bless you, Betty, for that word. Go in, and light the fire; and we will set about getting breakfast ready."

CHAPTER IV.

SUNRISE.

THE sun will rise to gladden the earth, even after the darkest night ; and just as his first light touched the eastern sky, breakfast was laid out in the little parlour, and the trio sat down with what poor appetite they could.

The Captain ate little enough, in spite of Betty's earnest entreaty that he would "take a morsel of something ;" but he did his best, more for Hester's sake than his own. As for Hester herself, she now seemed the bravest and heartiest of the three ; talking incessantly on all sorts of topics, and even laughing gaily,—so it seemed,—in very wildness and exuberance of spirits. She

joked with Jennie about her shopping of the previous night, asked for the latest news, and complained of the scantiness of the budget. Then she launched off into chatter about the Preventive men, the last "run" at the Cove,—and asked gravely when the next was coming off.

"Hester, child," said her father, at last, "are you going crazy,—or what is coming over you? One would think, to hear you talk, that there wasn't a cloud in the sky,—instead of it's being the darkest day that ever came to us."

"I don't believe in clouds any longer, papa; it is broad daylight now, and we shall have sunshine yet."

The words were barely out of her mouth, when hasty steps again crossed the garden. A loud ring at the bell again announced a visitor, and in another moment, to their amazement, in walked Fairleigh himself, who had dispensed with old Betty's attendance.

and made his way into the room unannounced.

His step was bold and firm as ever ; and there was a light in his face, and truth in his eyes, as he kissed Hester, and shook hands cheerily with the whole party. Then he spoke.

“ Captain Langley,” he said, “ the time has now come for me to speak out clearly and fully ; and I will do so plainly and briefly as I can, for your sake, for dear Hester’s, and for my own.

“ The story which that poor scoundrel told you yesterday, in a certain sense, was true ; in a certain sense, it was false. It was a lie of the worst kind the devil can invent ;

“ ‘ For a lie that is half a truth is the foulest lie of all.’

“ It is quite true that many, many, a long year ago my father was convicted of felony ; he was sent out of the country as a forger ; and the rest of his life was spent in banishment away from all who knew and loved

him. He never came back to England, and I never saw him again. He was a butcher, too,—as you have been told. But he was no forger, and never committed the crime for which he was convicted. Russell never told you, perhaps he never knew, that at the very time John Fairleigh lay dying,—among thieves and convicts in a distant land,—the villain who had been tried with him for forgery, and escaped, again fell into the clutches of the law, was tried for robbery and forgery, convicted, and sentenced to be hung. Then, at last, when it was too late, he confessed—confessed that he, and only he, had been guilty of the crime for which John Fairleigh had been hastily and unjustly condemned. Nay, he confessed far more than this ; that his friend—for friend he had once been—had no knowledge whatever of the frauds in which he was said to have shared. And of all these statements he brought forward full and ample proof.

“The result was that a full and free pardon was at once sent out to Sydney, with orders that my father should be released, and sent home, with a free passage, in the first frigate sailing for England. But, unhappily, before the pardon arrived he was beyond the need of all human forgiveness ; and had passed to an account where errors are unknown, and justice is done.

“Of all this we, his children, in England knew nothing accurately until afterwards. But he had worked hard in the land of bondage—so we afterwards found—had grown rich, and at last sent home money enough to provide for me, his only son, and to educate me as a gentleman. I went to Oxford, did my work there, came back to London, and in due time became a barrister. After some years of hard work, with the help of my father’s earnings in New South Wales, as a sheep-owner, I gave up the practice of the law, came down to Lipscombe, and bought

the Manor-house. The rest of my history you all know. .

“I am not aware, Captain Langley, of anything in my whole career of which I have need to be ashamed; though until now I have not felt bound to make it known even to you. I trust there is nothing of which you need be ashamed, or which will bring a pang of sorrow or regret to the heart of your daughter, whom I still hope to make my wife before the clock strikes noon to-day—unless,” he added, turning to Hester as he spoke—“unless she repents of her bargain.”

But at this point the Captain could restrain himself no longer, but having uttered a loud and cheery “Hurrah!” rushed upon Fairleigh, and shook him warmly by the hands, as he exclaimed,—

“How could I ever be such an old fool as to believe the first bundle of lies that fell in my way, simply because a knave invented them?”

“My dear friend,” interrupts Fairleigh, “there was every reason for you to believe, while you fancied I knew all this, and took no notice of it; above all, when I turned my back on that fellow all yesterday, and left the place without a word!”

“Hang the dog,” replied Langley, “I deserve three-water grog for a month, for ever being so bamboozled, gulled, and taken in. But mind you, Fairleigh,—when I first heard it, I told the fellow to his face it was a pack of rascally bunkum, fit only for the marines, and too bad for them. It was Hessy, here, who stuck to you through thick and thin; who held out, even last night, in spite of your letter, and trusted the man she loved. God bless her!”

“Amen to that, my friend. But, my darling,” he said, turning once more to the happy girl whose face was now dyed with tell-tale blushes, “my darling, it was a wicked and cruel trial for you, for which I

have no excuse to offer, and foolish, head-long haste can never justify. But the temptation was too strong for me. Can you ever forgive it?"

"Forgive you?" says the old man; "she has forgiven you already—ages ago. Love forgives everything but doubt of itself; and you never doubted hers, Fairleigh."

"Never, for a single moment," exclaimed the offender—"never, or I could not have dared to put it to such a trial."

As for Hester herself, she said not a word, audibly. But her eyes spoke for her in a language which his could not mistake. She was too proud, too happy, too thankful, to speak in any other way.

But as, at this moment, the Captain and Jennie Moreton slipped out of the room, we cannot do better than let poor Hester whisper pardon to her lover in her own way, when no ear but his can overhear it.

That she did forgive him is pretty clear;—

for five minutes later Jennie herself rushed into the room, and ordered the happy bridegroom to leave the house instant.

"Mr. Fairleigh," she cried, "it's altogether a defiance of all rules for you to be in the house for a single moment this morning. It's nine of the clock now; how, in the name of wonder, do you think the bride is to be dressed, and at the church in time, to say nothing of the breakfast, about which old Betty is going crazy? The bridesmaids are to be here at ten, and must not catch even a glimpse of you. Begone at once."

In two minutes from that time, Fairleigh was once more on his horse's back, and galloping away, as hard as four legs could carry him, to the Manor-house. Behind this horseman *atra cura* does not sit.

It was a bright winter's morning. The sun rose slowly up the soft, cloudy sky, shining brightly on the quiet valley, and touching with gold the pinnacles of the old

church-tower in Lipscombe, which rang out with a merry peal. The music of the marriage chimes blended happily with the sunshine ; and Mrs. Grundy, after a day and a night of hungry speculation, had nothing for it but to subside into silence. The whole parish had been in a fever of expectation, but all hands were forced to admit that a bonnier wedding had never been seen since that virtuous matron herself was a bride.

Even Roper, in his dingy office, caught the infection, and forthwith compounded for the next *Gazette* a glowing and romantic paragraph worthy of Hymen himself.

When the marriage bells again sent forth their joyous music, as the carriages drove away, there was but one ear on which they fell with bitterness—that of the wounded man who lay groaning over his misfortunes in the lonely solitude of the editor's best parlour. Look which way he would, the

prospect was black and blank indeed. All his plans of revenge had ended in failure, his hopes of success in smoke; his boasted friends in the billiard-room and elsewhere all seemed to have deserted him; save and except old Roper, he had neither friend nor acquaintance "that cared a rush whether he was dead or alive."

These last were his own bitter words, and things looked almost gloomy enough to warrant their being true.

He was lying on a dingy horsehair sofa, near the open window; and as he lay there, repining on his unhappy fate, the sound of the happy marriage bells filled all the room with brightness, though for him they had no message but one of gloom and discontent.

"Confound the noisy jangle," he grumbled to himself at last. "Some poor fool taken in again, by a woman." And then, all at once, the thought flashed across his mind as to who the poor fool might be in this case,

and who the woman was ; and neither thought improved his temper.

With his arm in a sling, it was impossible to shut down the obnoxious window, even if the sound of the hateful bells could be shut out by any means. Roper was away at the office ; the servant was at the front door, watching keenly for the return of the wedding party from church ; so that for a long time Russell pulled and pulled at the bell in vain. At last she condescended to notice the furious peal : the obnoxious window was shut, and the sick man somewhat comforted by the news that Mr. Sam Roper was waiting below to see him.

Meanwhile, after her dreary night of sorrow, sunrise had come to Hester, in such golden and royal splendour as left no hope ungratified. Her trial had been sudden and sharp, but she had borne it ; she had trusted her lover, and he had proved himself worthy of all trust. Her father was louder in his

praises than ever. Even Jennie Moreton, always on the watch, had not a word to say against him. And as she rattled down High Street, in the wedding chariot, with the arm of the man she loved round her waist, all memory of her past sorrows and fears seemed blotted out.

She saw nothing of the hollow, eager, pair of eyes that watched her carriage drive past, from an upper window in the High Street; but looking up into the happy, proud, face by her side, she forgot that such a person as Tom Russell had ever existed.

The wedding breakfast, although spread in a small room, now forced to accommodate double its usual number of guests, was a gay and happy one; and, in spite of all Betty's forebodings, proved an entire success. She had been almost driven into despair by the perplexities of the previous night; but, having once professed to believe that Mr. Fairleigh was as true as steel, she held fast

to her creed with desperate tenacity, and went on with her wedding preparations as steadily as if not a cloud of doubt had risen.

The cream, the roast chickens, the custards, the cold pheasant, and the cheese-cakes were beyond praise; there was plenty of champagne, from Fairleigh's own cellar; and both the bridesmaids were pretty—an indispensable requisite for a sunny wedding-breakfast. In addition to which, the bride herself was young and charming, with a shy joy beaming over her whole face, and happy tears now and then shining in her eyes like "dew on a violet." The bridegroom was a man, "a rare man," as old Betty phrased it, "that knowed how to hold his own, and had all the tiles on the roof;" the guests were all old friends, and the host was an old sailor and a gentleman.

All, therefore, went well; and when the happy couple started for the North on their way to Edinburgh, that fairest of all fair

modern cities, they carried with them a host of good wishes that might have turned into honey the dreariest of winter moons.

They were to be away for a couple of months, and long before that time had expired the threatened interruption to the marriage had ceased to be the nine days' wonder in busy Lipscombe, and become a forgotten thing of the past. Life at "The Rosery," at first strangely broken by Hester's absence, began to drift quietly back into its old channel; and his niece became to the old man more like a daughter than ever. A second summer seemed to have overtaken him in his old age; and, free from all care, he did his work on the cliff with a zeal and activity that gave the Preventive men no rest. Nothing seemed to escape him. They had never known him so sharp, or so cheery, for many a long year. He had given up all dabbling in mines, and other golden roads to ruin; and would have nothing to do even

with the safer speculation of the "*Auriphonic Wash*," in behalf of which his old friend now at length really began to work hard, and by which some guineas were made.

"Sam, my boy," the Captain would say, "I only wish for your sake that deafness was as common and as catching as measles ; and I drink this tumbler of grog to your success. But I've got into smooth water at last, and I don't mean to go a cable's length outside the Breakwater again."

CHAPTER V.

MOUSE-HOLE COVE.

Two miles to the west of the Preventive station at Lipscombe was the little fishing village of Mouse-hole. It lay scattered, oddly enough, in broken fragments along the edge and even over the brow of the cliff; consisting almost entirely of little groups of whitewashed cottages, which, with their brown thatch, nestled into little corners and hollows, wherever there seemed to be any shelter from the wind. The one exception to this scattered arrangement was a row of about twenty houses, in the centre of which stood a small public-house, called "The Jolly Fisherman." The inhabitants of Mouse-hole were almost entirely fishermen, who earned a

scanty living in the narrow Cove, and adjacent bay, by trawling for the shoals of herring, pilchards, and whiting, which in most seasons were found there in great abundance. The men were a wild, hardy, lawless set of fellows, who well deserved their reputation of being inveterate smugglers; and the *Harpy* revenue cutter had more trouble with the Mouse-hole boats than any on the whole coast. There was scarcely a hut or cottage in the whole district in which a keg, or bottle or two, of French brandy could not be found, if one but knew the right time and where to look for it. But this was exactly what nobody but the owner did know; and many an ineffectual search had Sam Akers, the look-out man on that beat, made for the contraband spirit. The little farmers,, who held land near Mouse-hole a mile or so in-shore, did not openly join in the forbidden traffic; but many a barn and outhouse and stable was used by

the smugglers as a hiding-place for kegs, when hard pressed ; and the owner was well content to connive at the practice, for which he always received a gallon or two of spirit, or a roll of tobacco, whenever a good cargo was run. The place, therefore, was a sort of bugbear to Captain Langley, and he regarded every Mouse-hole man as his avowed enemy. This will serve to explain the following dialogue that took place one afternoon between him and his first lieutenant, Sam Akers, an old man-of-war's man, who knew well every yard of the coast for miles on either side of the Cove. The two were standing by an old weather-beaten flag-staff on the top of the hill overlooking the village.

“Well, Sam, when is this precious cargo that you talk of going to be run? Here have we been on the look out, pretty well day and night, for the last month or more, and not a sound or sign of mischief have we met with.”

"All the same, your honour, there's a game afloat somewheres. My mate, Jackson, was down at 'The Jolly Fisherman' last night, dressed up as a Frenchman that couldn't speak a word of our 'lingo;' but he had his ears open as he sat in the corner, and though they were rather shy in their talk at first, he made out plain enough that there was a cargo afloat somewhere, and that the business was to come off somewhere between Mouse-hole and our place; and Friday was to be the night for it."

"Bravo, Sam! Just like the fools, to let the cat out of the bag; and of all days to pick out a Friday. By Jupiter! they'll find that the old Captain won't be asleep this time. We shall have the whole set, kegs and all, safe in Lipscombe jail that night. Could he make out any of the fellows?—all Mouse-hole rogues, I suppose?"

"Mostly, Cap'en—mostly; but a goodish lot of gipsy folk was among 'em—some

strangers like, and some of hercabouts that he could swear to, daytime or dark. Ay, ay, sir, we shall nab 'em this trip, and no mistake, or my name an't Sam Akers.'

In due time the eventful Friday came ; a bright, clear, star-lit night, with little or no wind ; about as bad a time for a run as could have been pitched upon in the whole calendar. And so indeed did the Mouse-hole men seem to think it. Quiet, steady, watch was kept up by the coast-guard all through that night between Mouse-hole and Lipscombe, but not a suspicious sound or sight was detected along the whole range of coast, nor for many a succeeding day and night.

This was a complete puzzle, not less to Jackson and Akers than to the Captain, who was obliged to comfort himself as well as he could with the thought that he had fairly out-generalled the enemy, and that the whole scheme was given up. Still, he was too old a hand to be easily hoodwinked, and orders

were given for especial watch to be kept over the suspected region, and every Mouse-hole boat that could not give a good account of herself.

This was the state of things when at last the bride and bridegroom returned from their wedding-trip, and settled down as respectable married people in their new home at the Manor-house.

Hester, of course, had much to tell of the far North, its lakes and mountains, cities and people ; and many a chat was held with Jennie and her father as to what she had seen, and above all as to the happiness of her married life. It was after one such talk with Jennie by the old fire-side that she rose to wish her cousin good bye, and make her way homewards before it grew dark.

“After all,” she said, “I have seen nothing nobler or grander than the old bay ; and as I go home to-night, I shall take the

lower path along the cliff to Lipscombe, and have a look at the sea, just for old acquaintance sake. Perhaps I may catch a glimpse of papa on my way. And so, with a strong caution from Jennie not to be lingering about too late, she set out by the old and well-known path.

It was a wild and stormy afternoon, and a white mist hung heavily over the sea, which she could hear thundering in sullen fury against the base of the cliff below. But Hester knew her way thoroughly, and went bravely on, wrapping her shawl stoutly about her to defy the wind, and thinking how surprised her father would be, if they should chance to meet.

As each well-known point came in view, —some old familiar hedge-corner, or turn in the path,—she looked more and more eagerly about for the old man's familiar figure, or maybe to catch the sound of his voice if he chanced to be busy with any of his men.

was kept, and at a time of day which made the risk tenfold greater.

Foremost among the crowd she now clearly made out her father himself, who bareheaded,—for his hat had been knocked off in the *mêlée*,—and with a drawn cutlass in his right hand, and a pistol in his left, was doing his utmost against two brawny fellows, each bearing a keg, and bent on making their way up the cliff. His two men, Akers and Jackson, were in the midst of a crowd but a few yards away, and having seized on one of the ringleaders, were endeavouring to drag him away from his companions and make a prisoner of him until help came,—which they trusted the signal shots of the pistol might bring. But the smugglers unhappily were nearly five to one in number, all wild and now desperate men, flushed with a sense of their own power, and determined to save their cargo—which they had run up upon the beach, in a couple of

fishing-boats—at all hazards;—while in such a storm of wind the signals were unheard. All this the terrified girl took in at a glance,—standing there, as if spell-bound, under the shelter of a great rock, behind which she kept out of sight. The Preventive men, under their stout old Captain, fought as sailors only can fight; but against such odds they had not a chance. The fellow whom they had attempted to secure was at once rescued; one by one they were seized and overpowered by the crowd, their hands and feet tied firmly together with stout rope,—and thus captive and helpless, they were laid down on their backs upon the shingle.

One of the last thus overpowered was the Captain himself, who, after a gallant resistance, was tripped up, and laid down beside his men, though before he was secured he had wounded more than one of his opponents with the cutlass, and thus rendered them doubly exasperated. Wild threats of

revenge had broken out among the wounded men ; but their ringleader had roughly insisted that no time should be thus wasted, and that the " sharks " should be simply left in bondage on the beach.

He was a smart, active, young fellow, and to Hester's horror and amazement, as she watched them from her hiding-place, wore a sailor's jacket and gold-laced cap, like that which she instantly remembered as having seen worn long before by the man who had done his best to blast her happiness in former days, though she could not make out whether he was Russell or not. One only of the king's men remained to be secured, and this was Sam Akers, who, in spite of overpowering numbers, still resolutely refused to submit. He set his back against a rock, and, cutlass in hand, declared that they should never take him alive.

Three or four of the smugglers, hearing this, had rushed upon him, but were all

another sound fell upon her ear, and filled it with terror. She had reached the last turn of the path,—just where amid some huge blocks of stone it met the beach,—when, as it seemed to her, in a single instant the open space between her and the water was suddenly filled with a crowd of sailors, Preventive men, and smugglers, mingled in the wildest confusion, and engaged in deadly strife. Then followed angry cries demanding submission in the king's name, and fierce shouts of derision and defiance in reply,—bursts even of laughter mingling with oaths and bitter threats of vengeance,—followed by the sudden, sharp crack of a pistol shot, thrice repeated.

In another moment she had realised the whole scene. The Mouse-hole men had clearly at last dared to make the run which they had so long threatened, as her father had told her, at a part of the coast where it was least expected, and scanty look out

was kept, and at a time of day which made the risk tenfold greater.

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waved back by the young sailor, who shouted out,—

“ Leave him to me, mates, and let’s see whether his toasting-fork is a match for a good stout stick.”

The words were inaudible to Hester, but she saw him, armed with a heavy bludgeon, rush upon Akers, and watched with breathless fear the desperate fight that ensued.

In a few minutes the toasting-fork was knocked out of the Preventive man’s hand, and then a second fearful blow on his bare head sent Akers lifeless and bleeding to the ground.

All then was hurry, uproar, and confusion, mingled with shouts of triumph, as the smugglers, now masters of the whole ground, seized on the rest of their cargo, and rapidly disappeared up the opposite slope. In ten minutes not a single vestige of the fight was to be seen, but the prisoners on the beach. Three or four of the smugglers’ party had at

once taken to their boats, and, in spite of a tempest of wind, put out to sea with all haste ; the whole cargo had been run ; and the sharks utterly done for.

For a few minutes Hester hardly dared to stir from her hiding-place, not knowing whether the enemy might not return ; but, finding that they had all disappeared up the cliff, and there being neither sight nor sound to alarm her, she at last crept out.

Her father's astonishment at the sight of his daughter was, of course, beyond all bounds.

"Good God! Hester," he cried, "what brings you here at such a time as this? You're not hurt, my child?"

"Never mind how I came here, father,—here I am, safe and sound ; the only thing is, what can be done to help you?"

"Done, Hessy? Here we are, tied, hand and foot, by these scoundrels, like a set of

lubbers ; and I am a ruined man—ruined and disgraced for ever. A cargo run in open daylight, and carried clean off in the very teeth of the king's officers ! But squeeze your hand into my pocket, and get out my knife, cut these rascally cords, and let us see what can be done."

The cords were soon cut, and in a few minutes the Captain and his companion were once more free. Poor Akers was still lying where he fell, and very clearly beyond all human help. Not only had he received a fearful blow from the bludgeon, but a second and more terrible one from the sharp corner of the rock against which he fell. With a handkerchief dipped in the salt water (for no other was at hand) his ghastly wounds were washed free from blood ; but, after placing his lifeless body on a heap of stones, out of the reach of the tide, this was all that could then be done for him. He was dead beyond all doubt. Then the Captain held a

council of war, and decided on the best course to be pursued.

It was clear that the cargo was gone ; and the boats had escaped out to sea for a time, or into the neighbouring fishing villages, and not one of their crew had been recognised. The whole affair, indeed, had taken Akers and his men by surprise. The Captain had that afternoon been going his round, as usual ; and, while talking with his lieutenant near the flagstaff, they had noticed the head of one solitary sailor among the furze-bushes half-way down the cliff. Having cautiously summoned the help of such few Preventive men as chanced to be near, they had made their way down into the little Cove about an hour before Hester reached it. Having there carefully hidden themselves away among the rocks, all they could do was to wait and watch. Then had followed the landing of the boats, and the whole scene witnessed by Hester from her hiding-place.

After a brief consultation, one of the men was despatched to bring together from the Preventive station the whole force that could be spared, and arrangements were made to set off as soon as they arrived in instant pursuit of the smugglers. In less than half an hour, Captain Langley, with twenty men at his command, all well armed, were on the brow of the cliff, and ready to start, burning to avenge the death of their comrade, and recover the lost cargo. All that could be done for Hester was to put her into the right path for the Manor-house, in making her way to which there was now chance of her being molested.

As for the smugglers, there was little hope of tracing their exact route, for the Captain knew from old experience that their first endeavour would be to get rid of all contraband articles among the neighbouring cottages and small farms, and then disperse to their own homes. His only plan, therefore, was to scatter

his men over the country, not too widely to be out of reach of signal, and trust to good luck in cutting off any stragglers, or discovering some of the hidden kegs.

For a mile or two inland not a single trace of men or cargo could be found ; and, as night was now coming on, the Captain began to give up all hope of avenging his terrible disaster. But, at the end of about an hour, he and six or eight of his men had reached a quiet little valley at the edge of the moor, and were there holding a second council of war, when one of his scouts came in with the joyful news that not half a mile off, in a barn near a farm-house, feasting of some kind was going on, clearly as a sort of triumph in celebration of their victory over the sharks, in which no doubt some of the smugglers were taking part.

And this news proved to be true. Flushed with their success, the smugglers had rapidly made their way to this one of their well-

known haunts, and, having dropped some of their cargo on the road at various safe places, there determined to rest awhile, believing that they had left the enemy hopelessly bound on the beach beyond all chance of help for some hours at least. One by one the Captain cautiously managed to recall nearly all his scattered forces; and then, in three separate bands, set out by different routes across country for the barn—a point well known to them all. Their plan was, if possible, to meet there, secure the entrance, then rush in upon the foe, and seize upon all who could be recognised.

The plan was bold and daring, and had every chance of success. In fact, had it not been for the young sailor already noticed in the fight on the beach, almost the whole band of smugglers would have been taken. But, though he had agreed to holding a supper in the barn, he had insisted that some watch should be kept against the sharks;

and a youngster whom he had posted at a certain cross-road close by suddenly rushed breathless into the midst of the feast with the news that—

“Six or eight blue-coats was creeping down the lane, and the old Captain among ’em.”

All was at once confusion and dismay. The leader of the party and one or two other gipsy-looking fellows instantly rushed to the door, where some horses stood tethered, mounted in hot haste, and were off, over hedge and ditch, as hard as spur and whip could drive their rough steeds. Others of the party seized upon kegs, and, hurrying out to an old well close at hand, dropped them down into the hollow, and hastily piled over the board which covered it a cartload of manure that stood close at hand ; a few well-known hands took to their heels across the moor, and the rest, panic-stricken, seemed resolved to take their chance of making

terms with the enemy, or to brazen it out with a bold face.

All these various manœuvres, however, occupied but a few minutes, and were barely completed when the Captain and his party rushed in at the open door of the barn. By this time the men on horseback were beyond all risk of capture ; but the fugitives across the fields were most of them cut off by the other blue-coats ; a large portion of the cargo was found in the barn, and some half-dozen of the suspected men were at once made easy prisoners. Bread, ale, meat, and brandy were there in abundance ; and the Captain, having thoroughly refreshed his men, seized the farmer's horses, and, having securely packed into a cart all the kegs and tobacco that could be discovered, set out with what triumph he could for Lipscombe.

It was not far from midnight when the contraband goods were safely deposited in the Custom-house, and the six prisoners

lodged in Lipscombe jail. The body of Sam Akers had been duly removed by the parish constable to the nearest public-house to await the coroner's inquest; and, at last, after a long day's work, the Captain found himself at home once more, and able to explain to Jennie Moreton the cause of his long and strange absence.

But, tell the story as he would, it was, after all, a sad one; and, though it ended with dash of colour in the capture of some of the cargo and six of the smugglers in the barn, many a long day passed before the old man could bear to hear any mention of it. Sam Akers had been an old and favourite fore-top man on board the Captain's last ship; they had both been paid off together, and both taken service in the coast-guard; so that the blow was a sharp and bitter one.

"And I believe," he added, in finishing his narrative—"I believe, Jennie, that that scoundrel Russell was at the bottom of the

whole affair ; and that, if it were not for him, poor Sam Akers wouldn't be now lying dead at 'The Dragon.' Two or three of my fellows swear to having seen a young fellow in a sailor's jacket and gold-laced cap very busy in the crowd ; and, for my own part, I have no doubt it was he, though not one of us, lying there on our backs like so many turtles, could tell who struck down poor Sam at last."

To all the story Jennie listened with breathless interest, and especially when he came to Hester's share in it ; but when it ended in pointing to Russell as the unhappy cause of all the disaster, and Sam Akers's death, she was puzzled what reply to make. If she let it all pass in silence, she would be called cold and indifferent ; to defend Russell, she knew well enough, would be to do him no service whatever ; to join in the Captain's suspicions might positively injure him. Wisely, therefore,

she shifted the topic from the murderer to the murdered man's widow.

"Surely," she said, "after all that has happened, that wretched young Russell would not again mix himself up in an affair like this, especially when his arm is only just healed. But, as for Betty Akers and her six children, there can be no mistake ; and I will set off the first thing in the morning and see what can be done to comfort and help her. Hester got home safely, I suppose ?"

"Oh, yes, my dear ; she is home safe and sound long before this. We put her into the right path close to the town, on our way after those villains. But there is my purse, Jennie ; do what you can for the poor widow, and tell her that her pension is certain. Sam served his full time, and I will do my best for her with the big wigs at the Admiralty."

The Captain's pipe that night was well

earned ; but the death of his old servant touched him deeply, and for many a long hour he lay, full of troubled thought at the whole day's disasters, before sleep came to his weary eyes. The friendships of old age are few and precious, and, once lost, not easily replaced. Sam had been his friend and companion in many a time of hard service, far more than his inferior ; and the time had not yet come when a captain looked upon his men as so many machines under his command. His grief, therefore, was even deeper than it seemed ; and he determined that no effort should be spared in endeavouring to discover who struck the fatal blow on the beach.

CHAPTER VI.

THE INQUEST.

ON the day following the events of the last chapter, when the editor of the *Gazette* went, as usual, to his office, he had breakfasted alone. Mr. Russell, so said the servant, was still asleep.

“Let him sleep, then,” was Roper’s reply ; “he came home dead beat last night, wherever his cruise had been, and will take a long spell now, no doubt. So leave the breakfast-things for him.”

The sleeper *did* take a long spell, as his friend surmised he would, and did not make his appearance until nearly noon ; and even then, with a worn, weary, look on his face

which told of recent and fierce exertion of some kind, and little of rest.

Breakfast over, he did not as usual go into the town in search of the news, or for a game at billiards; but sat moodily dreaming and smoking over the fire. As he thus sat, the servant entered to clear the table, bringing in her hand a letter.

"A letter for you, please, sir; a little boy brought 'un just now, and said, 'for Mr. Russell, and no answer.'"

"*Mr. Russell, High Street,*" was the whole address; and the handwriting was strange to him. He opened the envelope, which merely contained a scrap of paper bearing on it these words:

"*The sooner you leave Lipscombe the better. Your life may depend on your doing so. Get away to sea, if you can. This comes from a true friend.*"

He read it again and again, but apparently was as much puzzled with the con-

tents as at first. Crumpling it into his pocket, he said :

“ Who brought this letter,—sure that you don’t know the boy ? ”

“ Quite sure, sir,—never set eyes on him before.”

“ And he gave you no message ? ”

“ Not a bit, sir.”

This vague, negative, information was all that Russell could elicit ; and leaving him for a time to ponder on it, we must wander half-a-mile out of the town to a little roadside inn, the *Blue Dragon*, where the inquest has just been opened on the body of “ Sam Akers.”

The body of the murdered man had been brought there on the previous night, and the jury having examined it, under the guidance of Dr. Andrews, the Coroner, the inquiry began without delay, and closed in a few hours. The facts laid before the jury by the few witnesses, up to a certain point, were

simple and clear enough. The deceased had met with his death by violence, and that violence at the hands of some one of the body of misguided men engaged in contraband traffic and open defiance of the law. "And whoever this person may be," said the Coroner, "it will be your duty to return against him a verdict that shall commit him to take his trial for wilful murder."

And up to this point of Akers having met a violent death, the evidence was clear enough. But, beyond it, neither the Captain himself, nor any of his fellow-prisoners who lay bound on the beach, could advance one step. All of them heard Sam Akers' absolute refusal to submit, as well as some one's reply of "Leave him to me, mates." They also swore to hearing sounds as of a scuffle going on for some few minutes. But, inasmuch as the whole thing took place behind them, and much nearer the cliff than the spot where they lay, they could say

nothing as to whose hand struck the fatal blow.

The verdict, therefore, seemed likely to be an open one.

But next, of course, came some inquiry as to the finding of the body by the murdered man's companions, and this naturally led to the manner in which they themselves had been liberated.

"Captain Langley's daughter!" exclaimed the Coroner, in amazement, "how came this lady, or any lady, on the scene? We have heard nothing of her." This was soon explained by the Captain himself; and then the Coroner decided that a messenger must be at once despatched to the Manor-house to summon Mrs. Fairleigh as a witness. This delayed matters for about an hour, but at the end of that time Hester, attended by her husband, entered the long room at the *Blue Dragon*, and the inquiry was resumed.

The only caution which her husband had given her by the way was :

“ Say as little as you can, my dear, and don't be afraid of his majesty the Coroner, though he *may* talk as ‘big’ as the Lord Chancellor himself.”

Of the examination which followed, there is here need only to touch on a few of the final questions as put by the Coroner, and answered by Hester Fairleigh.

“ You were, then, Mrs. Fairleigh, a witness of the whole engagement on the beach ? ”

“ Yes: as I reached the bottom of the path the two boats had just been hauled up upon the sand ; the men leaped out, and in a moment the whole beach seemed one crowd of uproar and confusion, when the Preventive men darted from their hiding-places.”

“ Did you know that they were hidden there ? ”

“ If I had known it, I should never have

gone near the spot. The fact is that on my way homewards I missed the path, owing to the fog and the uncertain light."

"You say that you saw the Coast-guard and their Captain one by one seized on by the mob, and laid bound upon the beach; what happened next?"

"Then came the terrible fight between poor Akers and one of the smugglers."

"Was that near enough to where you stood to see and hear what was going on?"

"Some forty or fifty yards away; but owing to the noise of the wind and sea, I could make out no words distinctly; and in the dusk I could not see very clearly."

"But you saw the fatal blow struck, you told the jury; could you swear to the man who struck it?"

"Certainly not."

"Can you give us any notion of what he was like, old or young, short or tall?"

"A young man, of middle height, as well

as I can remember. But I was in such a state of terror the whole time that I cannot be positive even of this little. Every moment I was in dread of being myself seen and dragged from my hiding-place."

"Mrs. Fairleigh," said the Coroner, "you have given your evidence with admirable good sense and self-possession, and the jury will readily understand your terror at being the sole witness of such a scene. Pray take your time, and compose yourself. I must, however, ask you to try to recollect what you can of what you saw, as on your evidence, it seems to me, hangs our only chance of discovering the murderer. A few more questions only, and then I hope we shall be able to release you from this painful ordeal. But pray take your time."

"You think that the man who struck down Akers with the bludgeon was young and of middle height. Have you no recollection of his dress?"

"He wore a sailor's jacket and a cap."

"A common sailor's cap? a fisherman's cap, such as you see worn by Lipscombe men?"

"No, not exactly a fisherman's cap. It had a peak in front, and a band to it of lighter colour. That is all I can be certain of."

Did it look like a gold band, such as naval officers wear in undress?"

"That I cannot be sure of."

"But it looked like one!"

"Yes,—but even of that I cannot be certain. The light was too uncertain for me to swear that such was the case."

"Only one question more, Mrs. Fairleigh, and I have done. To the best of your recollection, have you lately seen such a cap and jacket worn by any other person known to you in this immediate neighbourhood?"

For the first time during the whole examination the poor girl faltered. The hor-

rible suspicion that had crossed her mind on the previous day once more flashed upon her memory with fatal distinctness, and for a moment she hesitated. She had not dared to whisper this suspicion even to her husband ; and, in her extremity of fear, she knew not what to say. But she was on her oath ; and the truth must be spoken, at all hazards. The truth was the best—must be best—in any case.

The eyes of the whole room were seemed fixed on her, and a terrible silence fell upon all present, as Hester's old friend, the Coroner, in a clear, kindly voice said,—as if to help her out of the difficulty,—“a naval officer's cap and jacket, such as you describe, Mrs. Fairleigh, are most unlikely things to be worn by one of a gang of smugglers ; but I must once more ask you if you hold to your former words, and whether you have lately seen such a jacket and cap worn by any one known to you ?”

“Yes,” she answered, firmly, “I have seen such, worn by a person known to me—not long since.”

“Will you tell the jury who that person was?”

“A person named Thomas Russell.”

Then a low buzz of conversation arose among the jury, and Hester Fairleigh having been again thanked for her evidence, once more breathed freely, and, having shaken hands with her father, left the inquest-room with her husband.

The Coroner, having briefly recapitulated the facts to the jury, finished his summing up in these words:—

“The deceased man, Samuel Akers, therefore, clearly met his death from a blow inflicted by some one of the gang of smugglers; that person wore a sailor’s round jacket, and a cap with a band of light colour. Some of the Preventive men have sworn that a smart young fellow, so dressed and

wearing a cap with a gold band, was acting as ringleader among the gang ; and the last witness, the sole spectator of the murder, swears that she has seen a similar jacket and cap recently worn by a young man named Thomas Russell. God forbid, gentlemen, that you should attach undue importance to a fact of this kind, for similar articles of dress may have been, and are, worn every day by dozens of innocent men in a seaport like Lipscombe. But, unhappily, this man, Thomas Russell, whom common report makes the companion of such fellows as these very smugglers, was seen, though in another dress, yesterday morning by another witness, on duty on the cliff, close to the scene of the murder, and not many hours before it occurred ; suspicion, therefore, you see, points strongly against him. But it is suspicion only. Whether he is really guilty of this murder, he and God only knows. This, however, is not the question which

you have to decide. Your verdict of guilty or not guilty will simply say whether there is or is not sufficient evidence before you to warrant his being committed to take his trial for killing and slaying Samuel Akers, the deceased man, whose body you have yourselves seen."

Within an hour from that time the jury brought in a verdict of GUILTY ; and the Coroner at once issued his warrant for the apprehension of Thomas Russell and his committal to Lipscombe Jail, to take his trial on the capital charge of murder.

To the accused man's utter amazement this warrant was served upon him that very evening, at his lodgings in High Street, as he sat talking with Roper over the defeat of "that old beggar Langley" on the previous day. It was useless, of course, to offer bail ; and that night Russell was lodged in Lipscombe Jail ; not far from the cell in which were confined some of his friends

from Mousehole Cove. The next day he was brought before the local bench of magistrates, and the same evidence as that of the preceding day having been adduced, the prisoner, after having made what statement he thought proper, was fully committed to take his trial at the next Assizes.

In the bitter solitude and darkness of his prison, he called to mind the mysterious warning which had reached him on the previous morning ; and now, when too late, he understood the friendly advice it conveyed.

How he further bore himself in prison remains to be seen ; for the present we must return to Hester Fairleigh.

No sooner had she escaped from the clutches of the Coroner at the *Blue Dragon*, and again found herself alone with her husband, than her chief anxiety was at once betrayed. One of her first questions was,—

“Henry, surely they never will find him guilty?”

"My dear Mrs. Fairleigh," replied her husband, pray do not talk *quite* so loudly. Everybody is looking at us, and wondering what delightful little matrimonial squabble is engaging us on our way home. If by *him* you mean Mr. Thomas Russell, I am afraid that the case against him looks very ugly. Of course, it is only one of suspicion at present; but I don't know clearly how far the other witnesses corroborated your statement as to the gold-laced cap, and, of course, it is impossible to say what other evidence may be forthcoming if he is committed for trial. As a friend of yours, my dear, I am sorry for him; but otherwise, I must say he deserves all he gets. You did all you could for him; and the truth will, in any case, do him the best service."

"He is no friend of mine, as you know very well, sir; and you must not scold me one bit at present. I cannot bear it. But, bad as he is, I can never believe he would

be so mad as to mix himself up with such a set of desperadoes. Besides, so Jennie told me, he had only just recovered the use of his arm ! ”

“ Revenge is very sweet, Hesty ; and this gentleman has always declared that he would have it, at any price. I don’t suppose he intended to kill poor Sam Akers, but just to wipe out old scores against the Captain. And, after all, he may be acquitted. To-morrow we must have a talk with the Captain, and hear what he thinks of the case.”

With this assurance Hester was for the time obliged to be content. But in a few hours the verdict of the Coroner’s jury, which had already flashed through the town, reached the Manor-house ; and in spite of herself Hester’s heart sank at the news.

True it was that the accused man was one who had insulted her, and done his utmost to slander her husband, and to prevent her

happy marriage ; true that she had learned to despise him as wholly unworthy of her regard. But still it was impossible to forget that he had once professed to love her, and she had once counted his love worth having, if she had not responded to it. Could he be so utterly worthless ? Mistaken, foolish, mad with jealousy, passionate, and easily led astray, she knew him to be ; nay, possibly, guilty of the crime laid against him, and yet it grieved her to think that by her word of evidence he had been condemned. Do what she would, it seemed impossible not to regard him with pity.

But of all this she had not ventured to say a word to her husband ; nor did she breathe a syllable of her trouble to him that night. Her burden was one that she must bear alone ; or at all events till she could share it with Jennie Moreton. He was too good, too generous, and too loving, to be troubled with any such troubles. So, she put on her

brightest looks, and no one who looked at her calm, happy face, that night, would have suspected that sorrow lurked beneath it.


As for Fairleigh himself, guessing pretty well how the land lay, he wisely determined neither to seek her full confidence, nor to avoid it. For the present, at all events, he would say nothing; but let things in a measure take their course. He had already playfully scolded his wife for not having told him of all her grave suspicions at first; and until she voluntarily sought his aid, he would not offer it. If possible, his love for her only showed itself by increased tenderness and affection.

CHAPTER VII.

IN TENEBRIS.

MEANWHILE, the days went heavily and darkly with the prisoner. He had been in prison a week ; and with certain restrictions his friends were freely allowed to visit him. But, out of all his gay and fast acquaintance who had won his money and helped to smoke his cigars, praised his various escapades, and when they dared, joined in them, not one came near him now. Dick Rogers had wished to do so, but had been sternly forbidden by the Doctor to go near the prison.

“ For the next six months, Dick,” said Andrews, “ you had better stick to the pestle and mortar. You have your bread to



make, and not too much character to lose. The fellow, even if not guilty of this last atrocious business, is an idle, worthless, scamp; and it will do him good to cool his heels in quiet for a time."

Sam Roper was the only acquaintance who seemed true to "the scamp" in this hour of trouble, and he spent an hour at the jail as often as the rules permitted.

But though Russell was glad enough to see him, and hear the news of the town, about his own affairs he was silent and sulky. At their first interview, indeed, he alluded generally to his own condition, but with little more than sudden outbursts of angry discontent at the verdict of the jury, or in bitter words, against Langley.

"One thing, Roper, I will tell you," he growled at last; "it's all a lie about my having had any hand in killing Akers, and I defy them to prove it."

"My dear fellow," replied the little man,

"it's all very well to tell me it's a lie, but the jury will look for more than this. The fellow who struck the fatal blow, it seems, wore a hat and cap like yours, he was about your size and height, and one of the Preventive men swears to having seen you on the cliff an hour or two before. And they must be guided by the witnesses."

"But who swore, Roper, that the cap and jacket were mine?"

"No one could swear to that, Tom. All that Mrs. Fairleigh swore was that they were like yours."

"Mrs. Fairleigh—confound her—what had she to do with it?"

"Do with it? Why, everything. She lost her way, it seems, in going home along the cliff, and came down to the beach just as the cargo was landed, and the row began. She hid herself behind a rock, and saw the whole fight; and helped to set the men free, after it was over and the coast clear. It was

on her evidence mainly that the suspicion against you was so strong. Poor thing ! she said as little as she could."

"Poor thing, indeed !" replied Russell, in his bitterest tones ; so it's owing to her, is it, that I'm in jail ? Curse her, and the whole lot of them. They have been false all through, and one lie more is nothing."

"But all the cursing in the world, Tom, won't get you out of prison, or prove your innocence at the Assizes. If you had no hand in the business, it will be easy enough to prove where you were, and what you were doing, at the time. A good *alibi* will clear you ; but upon my life, Tom, if you can't prove this, things look very ugly."

"And is that all the comfort you can give me, shut up in this beastly hole of a place ? Suppose I don't choose to say where I was, and what I was doing ? Are you going to swear away my life, like all the rest ?

"My dear Russell, I am going to swear

nothing. Thank God, I know nothing. And as to comfort, I can only tell you what seems the best thing to be done. If you can't or won't prove an *alibi*, all the worse for you. But don't take my word ; send for a lawyer—you *must* have one—and take his advice ; and meanwhile, if it's any comfort to you, abuse me to your heart's content. You will want money, too. Have you got any ?”

But Russell would listen to no such plan. He had no money to spend on rascally lawyers ; he would do nothing ; he would take no steps whatever. He could swear he was not guilty ; and if they chose to perjure away his life, they might ; if they did, they would hang an innocent man.”

Such was the result of Roper's first interview with the prisoner, and during the week Russell was stubbornly silent about the trial, and would answer no questions whatever concerning it. And seeing this was the

case, the old man, deeply grieved, gave up the task as hopeless.

For a time, indeed, the prisoner kept up this air of "bravado ;" but by degrees the silence and solitude of prison life began to tell on him, and he sank into a state of dismal despair, from which nothing seemed to rouse him. His jailor now and then said a word to cheer him, and even offered, as far as the rules allowed, to help in communicating with his friends.

"Is there nobody that you'd like to see—no friend that could lend a hand to get things straight?" asked the man, kindly.

"Friends? I haven't got a single friend. Who would be friends with such a poor devil as me? It's all owing to them that were once friends that I am here at all. No, no: let them stay away. If any one comes, except Roper, say, I don't want their company here."

And so the days went by ; and the time

fixed for the Assizes drew near. But one afternoon the jailor entered Russell's cell, with a message that a woman was at the gate, who begged to see him at once.

"Tell her to be gone, then," said Russell; "she is no friend of mine, and I will not see her."

"Whether she is a friend of yours or not," replied the man, "I can't say. All I know is, that she begged and implored me to let her in. 'Tell him,' she says, 'that I must and will see him; that it's a matter of life and death to him. I will not leave the gate till I do see him.'"

"Did she give her name?" says Russell, sulkily.

"No; she said her name was of no matter. She was an old friend and a true one. And as far as face and looks goes," added the warder, "I must say she looks true, every inch of her. It can't do no harm to see her

for five minutes. And there isn't much time left for to-day."

"Well," was the surly answer, "if I must, I must."

"That's right, man; don't be down-hearted, but cheer up a bit. I've know'd many a chap in worse scrapes than yours get out of the mess after all. I'll bring her in myself, and you must look sharp over it, mind."

In two minutes Russell was alone with his visitor.

She was a young woman, plainly and even poorly clad, and at the first glance he did not recognise her in the dusky light. But the moment she spoke all doubt was at an end.

"You are surprised," she said, "to see me here, Mr. Russell?"

"Jennie Moreton!" he exclaimed, starting up from his seat. "Come to preach, I suppose?"

"No," she answered very quietly ; " not come to preach, though I might easily find a text ; but come to find out the truth—to find out whether my old friend Thomas Russell is guilty of murder or not."

"But that is for the judge and jury at the Assizes to find out."

"Yes, yes," answered the firm, clear voice, "that may be true enough ; but I intend to be beforehand with them. I must know the truth at once—this very night."

"Must is a strong word," he answered, in a surly voice ; "but how will you set about finding out the truth ?"

"By putting the question point blank to the accused person—Was it your hand that struck down Sam Akers on the beach ?"

"Ask him ! well, of course you may ask him ; but who will rely on *his* answer—a poor, idle, drunken scamp ? Of course, *his* word will go for nothing."

"Not with me. He will not tell *me* a lie. He will not dare to do it."

"Why not?"

"Because, whatever others may do, I shall believe him."

"Why should *you* believe him?"

"Never mind '*why*:' he will not look me in the face and tell me a falsehood more than I shall deal falsely with him. I know this surely as I know my own name."

And as Jennie Moreton uttered these words, a glance shot from her dark grey eyes that would have pierced a far stonier heart than the one before her. It was a glance of loving pity, of sorrow, and womanly tenderness; and as it fell upon him, Russell turned away, abashed and ashamed.

"I hardly thought there was one person left," he said, at last, "who would or could trust Tom Russell's word; and it seems as if I was mistaken. But suppose that in reply

to your question of guilty or not guilty, he said '*Guilty*,' what then ?"

"What then ?" she answered, with ineffable tenderness in every tone of her voice. "Then I should try to help him to make his peace with heaven, and drive him to confession where only pardon can be got ; that if I could not save him from the just punishment of crime among men, I might, at least, save him from the more terrible anger and judgment of a God that loves him, and of a Saviour that died for him on the bitter cross. Having trusted *me*, I would teach him to turn to the Blessed and Merciful One whom all can trust, without whom there is neither joy nor peace in earth or heaven, who only can comfort the broken-hearted and heal the sick, and turn crimson guilt into snow !"

Up to this point, the prisoner had stood and listened, apparently unmoved ; but with these eager, impassioned, words, Jennie had

risen, crossed the room, and laid her hand upon his arm.

“And now,” she continued, “now, Thomas Russell—for I call you by your Christian name, as in the old days, when we were boy and girl together—I have answered all *your* questions; turn and look me in the face as I ask you that one for which I came: Guilty or Not Guilty?”

Her whole heart trembled on her lips as she uttered the words, and her loving eyes flashed with infinite pity and impatience, as she waited for his answer, which came boldly and promptly enough.

“Not Guilty,” he replied, “as God shall judge me.”

“Thank heaven for that!” she cried; all then may be well yet; all *shall* be well yet.”

And then her quiet, grave face lighted up with a happy smile that, as she looked at the sad, careworn, miserable man, went straight to his heart. It was like the swift

touch of an electric spark ; and resist it he could not. Her voice was to him like a voice from another world, out of the sunshine of other days—days long since gone by, and yet it seemed not utterly dark and dead.

“God bless you, Jennie Moreton,” he said at last, “for trusting me once more, and saying to me one kindly word. It’s the first I have heard for many a long day, and, I suppose, it will be pretty well the last.”

“The last !” she cried ; “why the last ?”

“Because,” he answered, in a broken voice, “though you believe me, no one else will.”

“But they must and shall believe you. As yours was not the hand that struck Akers, you will be able to show that you were elsewhere, and doing other things, and so prove your own innocence.”

“Impossible, Jennie ; impossible.”

“Impossible !” she answered. “Nothing

right and true is impossible—except to a coward.”

“I am no coward,” he said, bitterly ; “and yet this is impossible. And even if I did tell them what you ask, it would only make matters worse—ten times worse than before.”

At this moment, hasty steps were heard in the passage, a key was turned in the rusty lock, and the good-natured jailor appeared.

“Sorry to say, ma’am, that your time’s been up this five minutes, and all visitors must leave the jail.”

“I am quite ready,” she answered. “Good-night, Mr. Russell. Only be true to yourself, and all will go well.”

They shook hands ; the key once more turned in the lock, and the prisoner was once more alone.

That night, for the first time since his imprisonment, he slept soundly, and naturally enough he dreamed of Jennie Moreton and the days of long ago, when, as boy and girl,

they had wandered up the valley of the Lip, and life seemed fair and bright. So bright, so vivid was the dream that he could hardly rouse himself the next morning to the stern fact of prison fare and the voice of the warder who brought his breakfast.

“That’s right,” said the man; “I’m main glad to see you looking as if you’d got a bit of life in you this mornin’. The judge and jury ’ll be wantin’ you next week; and you must cheer up by then.”

CHAPTER VIII.

WOMAN'S LOVE.

"JENNIE, child," said the Captain that night, "you are as bright and bonny as a lark. What has come to you, my dear?"

"Spring weather," she answered, gaily; "I'm not proof against sunshine and the song of birds, the green woods full of blue-bells and primroses, such as I had all the way home from Lipscombe to-day. It's a hard heart that never rejoices."

"And your's is not very hard, my dear, as I hope some smart young fellow will find out before long."

"Glad to see him, whenever he comes," she answered lightly, and then went off sing-

ing to some little household task, too glad to escape any further cross-questioning.

For, in spite of the good news which she had gathered at the jail, she knew well enough that her difficult task was not half completed. But she had put her hand to the work, and was too true a woman to draw back. Love urged her on ; love was ready to face all difficulties, and strong to overcome all obstacles.

No sooner was the Captain off on his round the next day, than her resolve was taken.

“ Betty,” she said to the old woman, “ when your master returns, tell him that I am gone to the Manor-house, and may not be back to dinner. Mrs. Fairleigh may keep me ; but I shall be home before dark.”

Half an hour’s quick walking brought her to the Manor-house, and, as luck would have it, the master and mistress were both at home. Hester was at work in her

own sanctum, and welcomed her most eagerly.

"I knew you would come," she said, "and I see good news in your face. What is it?"

"Not much, Hessy, not much; but still good as far as it goes. He is not a murderer."

"Thank God for that, Jennie! but where did you get your news? how do you know it's true?"

"Never mind, dear, how I know it, for I have no time to tell you now; but I am as sure of it as I am of being alive at this moment. Where is your husband? and is he in a good temper?"

"How dare you ask such a question? Of course he is in a good temper. Who could be otherwise with such a bright and happy face as yours. Why, you look ten years younger than you did two days ago."

"Hessy, dear, I want fifty pounds; and I must have it this very day. I want a heap

of good advice ; and your good husband must give me both. If this man is to be saved, we must stir at once ; there's not a day to lose ; the lawyers must hunt up evidence, and witnesses will swallow money like fish drink water. You are astonished at my impudence, I can see, but Thomas Russell has no money and not a friend in the world ; and I can't stand by and see him hanged for want of a ten-pound note.

"You remember, Jennie, how this man has behaved to Henry ?"

"In that, my dear, lies my best chance. I know well what your husband has had to bear, and how he has borne it. He must heap coals of fire now on the enemy's head."

In reply to this, Hester rose very quietly, kissed her sister, and rang the bell.

"Tell your master," she said to the servant, "that I shall be glad if he will come and speak to me here as soon as he can."

"A cabinet council," said Fairleigh, laugh-

ing as he entered the room. "What mischief is in the wind to-day? Two young women plotting together at this time of the day bodes no good. Miss Jennie, you are looking charming!"

"Beggars seldom do look charming, Mr. Fairleigh, so that I am in luck's way this morning. For it is as a beggar that I am here now, though not for myself. I come to ask for two things, one of which everybody is ready to give and nobody to take, and the other everybody ready to take and few to give—advice and money. I am ready to ask and to take both."

"And both you shall have, Miss Jennie,—as far as it lies in my power to give——"

"Stop," she said; "don't be in a hurry to promise until you know what and for whom I ask. Thomas Russell, the man who has injured and slandered you without mercy,—now lies in Lipscombe jail, in danger of being hanged,—and though

innocent, he may be ruined for want of help. He is friendless, and his purse is empty. He would rather die than ask Mr. Fairleigh for aid. I ask for money and for advice to save him from the gallows!"

For a moment,—a sudden gleam of surprise and hesitation spread across Mr. Fairleigh's face—but it was only for a moment, as he glanced at the two eager petitioners who waited for his answer.

"He is a worthless dog," he answered; "so worthless, I am afraid, Jennie, as to be hardly worth your labour, and certainly not worth my hatred. But, if innocent of this last charge, God forbid that he should be found guilty for want of a helping hand. Tell me how you know he is innocent."

"I can tell you nothing *now*," she answered; "you must take my word, and that only, for it. I will pledge my life that he is Not Guilty, and work my fingers to

the bone to repay you, if you will but give me the money."

"The money you shall have beyond all doubt; all I want to see is how it will serve you best, and that you yourself don't fall into the hands of the Philistines."

"God bless you, Mr. Fairleigh, for your kind words, which I can never repay as they deserve. I am now going into Lipscombe to put the whole case into a lawyer's hands; and money I suppose, or the certainty of it, will be the first thing he looks for."

"Come with me," he answered, "into the library, and I will give you a letter to Jack Tucker,—my own man of business. Leave all question of expenses with me; and meanwhile, set to work and hunt up what evidence you can, as he may direct you. One word, and only one word of advice, is all I shall give you, and *that* you must take. Tell him all and everything you know about the case, from beginning to end."

Jack Tucker, Mr. Fairleigh's man of business, was an old and shrewd attorney, well known on the Exeter circuit, as being the agent for several county families, and a clever though rather unscrupulous lawyer in small criminal cases. Hitherto he had been chiefly engaged in matters of poaching and smuggling; and this was the first case of murder in which he had been concerned. Having read the barrister's letter, he listened to Jennie Moreton's story with eager care,—and when she had finished gravely shook his head, as he answered,—

“My dear lady, all this is very well between you and me, and we may both believe that he is, as you say, perfectly innocent of the charge brought against him, but with the judge and jury it will simply go for nothing. Is there no way of getting the truth out of him?”

“I have done my very utmost and best, sir,” replies Jennie; “but where he was, or

what he was doing, on that afternoon, he declared it was impossible for him to tell."

"Then he is simply a fool for his pains, ma'am, and no jury on earth will acquit him. It will be manslaughter at the least,—and that means, possibly, transportation for life. But I will go to the jail at once, and see what the terrors of the law will do to squeeze the truth out of him. You may depend I hope on hearing better news when you come to me to-morrow at ten."

"I have only one caution to give you," says Jennie, "before you go, and that is to beware of mentioning the name of Fairleigh. To him it will be like a scrap of scarlet to a mad bull. Say that I sent you, if you like, —but beware of the Manor-house."

"Many thanks," he replied, "for the caution; but I cannot act on your other suggestion until I know to whom I have the pleasure of speaking. Mr. Fairleigh merely mentioned you as his friend?"

Having thus cleverly obtained his client's name and address, Mr. Tucker politely bowed her out of the office, and promised that no pains should be spared on behalf of the prisoner in Lipscombe jail.

Punctually at visiting time, that afternoon, went Mr. Tucker to the jail; though it was with extreme difficulty that he got into Tom Russell's presence.

"*Tucker?*" said Russell to the jailer, "I don't know the name, and don't want to know it."

"Tell Mr. Russell," said the lawyer, when this message was brought to him, "that whether he knows me or not, I am come here for the sole purpose of seeing him, and for his benefit, at the request of a lady whom he knows; and that I do not intend to spend all this trouble for nothing. If he won't see me, I shall nevertheless see him."

A long and somewhat stormy interview

followed,—of which we cannot but note the closing scene.

“ On the whole, then, Mr. Russell, you prefer being hanged or transported for life,—to telling me the plain truth as to what you were about on that afternoon ? ‘ Don’t care,’ is a very good dog to bark, but a poor thing—as you will find—when it comes to real biting. Have you really thought over the whole subject carefully,—a mob in the foreground, a white night-cap pulled over your eyes,—Jack Ketch at your elbow, and the gentlemen of the press ready for the last dying speech and confession;—to say nothing of all the comforts of death by suffocation ? If you won’t take *yourself* into consideration, in all this business, you ought surely to have some little thought for your friends ! ”

“ I have no friends,—as I told Miss Moreton,—none.”

“ Nonsense, man, nonsense. Your worst enemy is yourself ; and for all I know, your

only enemy. And here are you, a young man, in the prime of life,—simply because you have been playing the fool for the last six months,—going to be hanged or transported for a matter of which you swear you are innocent; and talking of having no friends, when a young and pretty woman is giving herself up, body and soul, to the one thought of how she may save you from the gallows. It's a poor, cowardly, business, to say the least of it; and, for my part, I thought cowards were drummed out of the merchant service, as well as the navy; but I suppose I was in the wrong there."

"Not a grain wrong," was the sudden and angry retort; "it's devilish seldom you lawyers are wrong. We are no more lubbers than the navy. What is it I am afraid to tell?"

"To tell me the whole truth, man! That is all I want."

In twenty minutes from that time the

whole truth was told, and Jack Tucker was on his way home with it ; making the best he could of a very knotty and difficult problem.

Jennie was at his office, punctually, at ten the next morning ; and eager enough to hear the result of his mission.

“ My dear madam,” said the lawyer ; “ I have little to tell you, and that little not very cheering news. For the first half hour it was a pitched battle between us ; but I won the trick at last, and forced him to open his mouth whether he liked it or not. It’s a question whether I know *all* the truth, but I got out of him at last that he knew beforehand that the cargo was to be run ; that he was near enough to the scene of action to see all that went on ; and that he afterwards barely escaped from the ‘ sharks ’ by dint of hard running across the country. That he took any share in the fight, he positively and absolutely denies ;

and our only chance lies in trying to prove that he was ignorant of the whole affair. As to his being a witness of Akers' death, or in any way privy to it, that of course is a matter to be kept as secret as the grave. You, madam, I can trust ; but a whisper of it to any of the opposite side, witness or counsel, will ensure his conviction. All we can hope is, that no one of the Preventive men recognised him in his headlong flight over hedge and ditch. That is all I can say for the present. The Assizes come on next week ; I will at once secure the best counsel to be got, and see what can be done. But we are terribly late in the field, and the case looks an awkward one. Write to me at once,—if you hear of a single grain of evidence in his favour.

In the anxious week that followed Jennie Moreton did all that woman could do on his behalf ; and yet seemed to labour in vain. She could hear nothing, discover

nothing, in the prisoner's favour. On the contrary, his case seemed darker and more hopeless than ever.

Fairleigh did all he could to cheer and advise her, but even he could extract nothing favourable from her daily budget of news.

The Captain had, at last, reluctantly given his sanction to all she was doing, but he said nothing further than—

“It's a wretched business, Jennie, from first to last, and all we can do is to get a pension for the widow. As for the fellow himself, the sooner he is out of the country the better.

“If guilty,” says Jennie, “but not else; and that has to be proved. Bad as he is,—let him have fair play. That is all I ask.”

But her heart misgave her, even as she spoke, when she remembered the lawyer's parting words, “We're late in the field, and the case looks an awkward one.”

The few intervening days before the trial

passed rapidly away, the prisoner was removed to Exeter, where the Assizes were to be held ; and as yet not a single point of evidence had she been able to gather in his favour. The mystery as to who the wearer of the naval cap and jacket could have been, unless it were Russell himself, was as great a mystery as ever ; and Jack Tucker spoke as gloomily as at their previous interview.

The wise-acres and gossips of Lipscombe were fairly puzzled ; and the editor of the *Gazette* prophesied in vain.

All at once, to complete Jennie's despair, came the crowning blow of all. The leading counsel on whom Tucker had relied had been suddenly taken ill on the circuit, and obliged to throw up his Brief ; and the other side had secured the services of both the other best men. "I will do what I can," so wrote Tucker, "but this is the most terrible blow of all."

It was a terrible blow, indeed ; and at first Jennie sat still under it in hopeless silence. But in another moment she was again herself, and waited calmly till the Captain came down to breakfast.

"What, off again, Jennie?" he said, as he found her dressed and ready to go out.

"Once, only this once more," she answered. "I have had bad news from Tucker, and must see Mr. Fairleigh at once. Give me your blessing, father, and let me be gone!"

There was no time for further questioning, and he saw by the look of her face that she was neither to be stopped nor stayed in her journey.

All he could do was to force her to eat a morsel of bread, and drink a mouthful of coffee. In another moment she was gone ; staying only to scribble one hasty line to the lawyer, which the Captain, at her urgent entreaty, promised should be delivered to

Tucker in person by one of the men on duty without a moment's delay.

This is what she wrote :—

"I shall see you in Exeter to-morrow morning, and bring with me a first-rate counsel. Don't fail to be there—punctually."

"J. M."

An hour later, and Hester and her husband had both heard all that Jennie had to tell, she herself having been summoned as a witness, though Fairleigh (who had impounded the letter with an official envelope) had as yet said nothing about it.

"This is sad news, Jennie, indeed," said Fairleigh, "and coming now at the eleventh hour, I am fairly puzzled how to advise you. But I will smoke a pipe over it in my study, and come to you again."

No sooner was he gone than Jennie Moreton at once decided on her plan.

"Hester," she said, in a low, clear, voice, "you have never failed me yet, for God's sake do not fail me now!"

"What can I do, Jennie? It seems a hopeless case to me; if I am summoned as a witness I must go,—but as to your going to Exeter, you must be mad to dream of it."

"Mad or not, Hesty, I must go. I have promised to meet Tucker there early to-morrow, and to bring a first-rate counsel with me. If I fail, Thomas Russell will be found guilty,—and he has not a friend on earth to help him but me."

"But if counsel is to be got, this Tucker will surely know how, and do all that can be done."

"It's too late, Hester, darling, too late to rely on him; the trial will come on to-morrow, and a single day's delay will ruin

all. My only trust, Hester, is in your husband."

"*My Husband*, Jennie? *My Husband*,—how can he help you?"

"I cannot—dare not ask him," replied Jennie. But for *you* he will do anything; for *you* he will go to Exeter and plead for this unhappy man, and save him from the gallows, if he can be saved. O Hester, Hester, I implore, I beseech you, go to your husband at once, and ask for me what I dare not ask for myself. O Hester, dearest, if this man is left to perish, it will break my heart,—I shall die. Now you know all my secret, have pity on me,—save me, save us both,—and I will bless you for ever."

Then, at last, came a passionate flow of tears which fell on Hester's face as she kissed the weeping girl, and said, with a troubled voice,—

"You have set me a hard trial, Jennie,—almost more than I can ask even of such

love as his ; and more than I can dare hope that he will give. Is there no other possibility of help but this ? What can I urge on Russell's behalf, how can I plead for him ? ”

“ Nothing else can save him ;—no one else but you. I know all your husband has borne at this man's hands, dearest, and how nobly he has borne it. Tell him I know all this,—that you know it all,—and implore him as he loves you,—as he hopes himself to be forgiven at last,—to crown all he has done and suffered by the noblest of all revenge,—that of saving his enemy from a shameful death. Hester ! he will refuse you nothing. Russell's life,—my life,—is in your hands.”

“ I will go, Jennie,—I will ask what you bid me. Stay till I come back.”

Then she left the room.

Her husband was pacing up and down the trellised walk outside his study, smoking

that pipe of reflection which he had spoken of, and apparently lost in thought; but not so lost that he did not at once detect the step of her he loved.

“Come in, Henry, come into your room,” she said, standing at the open window, “your wife has something to say to you, only for her husband’s ear.”

Her grave manner puzzled him, but all he said was,—

“Just in time, my dear, for I am fairly bewildered by this last news of Jennie’s, and can see no way to help her.”

Then he came in, and she, with loving hands, forced him into his usual arm-chair, and knelt down by his side.

“There is but one way to help Jennie,” she said, as she looked up into his face,—
“only one way, and I am come to tell you what it is. Henry, if this man Russell is found guilty, she who has been a sister to me all my life will die. She is breaking her

heart now. She knows how shamefully he has treated you, and how nobly—yes, I *will* say it,—how nobly you have returned good for evil. There is no possible chance of escape for him but by your help.”

“My darling, I am most willing, most ready to help, if I only knew how.”

“Listen, dearest, listen. *You only* can save them; and she implores you as you hope to be forgiven at last to take the noblest revenge man can take on an enemy, by snatching him from death. She implores you to do this for her sake, for mercy’s sake. I implore you, dearest, by a tie stronger, deeper, purer, still. Henry, you must go to Exeter yourself; you must plead for this man as you never yet pleaded before judge and jury, simply because I ask you. I put Jennie out of the way altogether, I cast away the plea of noble revenge, and I ask you to go, because once upon a time Hester Langley loved this wretched man Russell

herself, and because I now love my husband with heart and soul, as he loves me! Have I dared to ask too much?" she added, again looking into his eyes with hers. "Is it too much?"

For one moment he looked back steadily into her eyes, then kissing her tenderly on the lips, he said,—

"Not too much, darling, for such love as yours and mine; though the test is a sharp one. You *knew* that you had but to ask."

"Perfect love casts out all fear and all doubt," she answered. "Had I not been certain, not a word of petition should have crossed my lips. But I must be off now, or Jennie will think I have failed. I cannot thank you, dearest, as you deserve, but she shall. You shall have thanks enough to last you for life."

"Tell her," he said, "that the coach starts at twelve from the *Rose and Crown*, and we must be ready in ten minutes."

Then Mr. Fairleigh rang the bell. "Tell Tom Davis," he said to the servant, "to have the dog-cart ready in five minutes, with the seat for two ladies; and to be ready himself to go with me to Exeter. They will send back the dog-cart from the *Rose and Crown*."

"I will take Davis with me," he said to Hester, "because he belongs to one of these gipsy gangs, and may possibly see some of his people to-morrow in Exeter. If anybody can clear this fellow Russell of his share in the fight, it must be one of the set that are to be on their trial for this smuggling business. Davis may get at him, when nobody else can. And now, Hester, my darling, I may as well tell you why you will have to go with us. A summons for you as witness came by post this morning, though I said nothing about it at the time; and as for what you are to do and say, there will be time enough to talk over that to-night.

How will you like to be cross-examined by your husband ?”

“ Thankful, very thankful, when it is all over.”

That evening, just as dusk began to creep over the quiet streets of Exeter, Hester, Jennie Moreton, and her counsel were safely lodged at the *Old London Inn*, one of the most charming and comfortable of west-country hotels, with spacious inner courtyard, and clusters of green, fresh, ferns ; its picturesque old gallery and broad staircases ; its genial host and cosy coffee-room.

The drive outside the *Telegraph* from Lipscombe to Totness, and thence to Exeter, through winding, steep, lanes, and warm, sheltered valleys ; at times along the edges of the moor, and at times within sight of the quiet sea ; along by fields of green, springing, corn ; and patches of woodland, full of harebell and primrose, with banks of mossy fern, had been most refreshing from

first to last. Even to Jennie herself, full as she was of anxious thoughts for the morrow, the swift motion through the bright fresh air, the song of the lark, and all the happy sounds and sights of country life, brought new strength and hope.

Failure was impossible; and as she saw Jack Tucker's face among the half-dozen idlers round the coach at the door of the inn, her beaming eyes told him that she brought good news.

"Ah! Tucker," cried Fairleigh, "you are the very man I want; came by the early coach, of course? I was wondering where you were to be found. Jennie, see to our rooms, my dear, and then order some tea and a grilled fowl. Mention my name,—they know me of old. I will come back to you in the coffee-room in half-an-hour. Now, Tucker, take a turn with me down High Street, where I can stretch my legs, and we can have a good talk."

Of what followed, we need only notice the few opening words.

"You are amazed to see me here, Tucker?"

"Yes, sir, I am rather taken aback."

"You will be still more amazed when you know why I am come."

"I know it already, sir. I looked in the lady's face. You're come about that fellow Russell."

"A very good guess, Tucker. And what about Russell? Will he be hanged?"

"God bless me, Mr. Fairleigh, you are never going to put on wig and gown again?"

"There is no help for it, Tucker. I must obey orders."

"Bravo, sir, then this poor devil of a fellow will have a chance, though he hardly deserves it."

"Tell me, Tucker, all you know about the case; and then show me the way to the

Castle. I must see the man myself to-night."

"See *him*," gasped Tucker; "*if you do*, good-bye to every chance of escape for him."

CHAPTER IX.

GUILTY OR NOT GUILTY ?

ON the list for those Assizes there were many much more remarkable, racy, and interesting cases than that of Thomas Russell ; so that the good city of Exeter was but little stirred the next morning from its usual quiet demeanour. The trial of the six men engaged in running the cargo of contrabands would, it was supposed, fill up all the morning, after which the jury would adjourn for lunch, and so be quite prepared for more serious work in the afternoon.

Things fell out just as it was supposed. Before noon the smugglers had been all convicted, and sentenced to various terms of imprisonment and hard labour, accord-

ing as they were proved to be more or less old offenders ; and during their trial the court had been scarcely half full ; nor was it much more crowded when preparations began for that of *Rex v. Russell* for the murder of Samuel Akers. The grand jury had at once, that morning, found a true bill ; but the city of Exeter seemed to take little or no interest in the case ; and all things and all people about the court wore a languid and faint air of indifference, which to Jennie Moreton was altogether inexplicable. It seemed impossible to her that what was of such deep, vital, interest to Hester and herself, could possibly fail to touch the hearts of all the thousands of strangers about her. To her it was a matter of life and death ; to them it seemed as nothing.

Since she left the Manor-house on the preceding day she had spoken scarcely fifty words with Fairleigh about the trial, or the

terrible issue that hung upon it, but it had been constantly in her thoughts, run into whatever channel the talk might. He had said nothing as to the line of defence to be taken, and alluded to only one of the special points of difficulty. But though silent, she knew that he was doing, and would do, his very utmost and best. She loved, and therefore trusted, him.

"I meant," he said at breakfast, "to have seen Russell last night, but, as I told Hester, Tucker insisted that my doing so would be worse than useless, and so I gave it up. I can get no clue whatever as to the wearer of the gold-laced cap and jacket; and there lies a weak point. Tucker knows nothing, and Russell won't help us with a single word. You know nothing about it, I suppose?"

"Nothing whatever," was Jennie's mournful answer.

And then Fairleigh set to work among his

papers, saying that he should be in Court all the morning, but would look out for her, and secure a quiet corner for her and Hester among the witnesses, about 2 P.M., when *the* trial was expected to begin.

Before starting, however, he sent for Davis, and taking him into a private room, said,—

“Now, Tom, it is clear that some of the gipsy folk had a hand in this smuggling business, and a lot of your people will be about the city this morning. Set to work at once among them like a terrier hunting a rat; and if you can get me one scrap of news about the fellow who wore the gold-laced cap, you will earn a ten-pound note for your trouble. But go to work like a mole, and keep it all dark—even from your best friend.”

Tom had been saved from worse than ruin when Fairleigh first took him, without a character, as odd man in the stables and gar-

dens, and his promises of exertion, therefore, were somewhat exuberant.

"I don't want no ten-pound notes, sir; but if any of our folks knows a word about this business of the cocked-hat——"

"No, no, Tom; a gold-laced cap."

"Yes, sir; of a gould-laced cap, you shall have the whole boiling before night."

"Too late, Tom, too late. I must have it before two o'clock. To-night it won't be worth sixpence; though you must bring it without fail, come when it will. Remember, Tom,—all expenses paid, and no questions asked."

Then Fairleigh, having dismissed the man, turned to say a few last words to his wife, who naturally enough had no great liking for her part as witness in the day's proceedings.

"Hester, my child," he said very quietly, "don't be troubled about your share in the work to-day. It is not an easy or a pleasant

task for a lady; but as you must go through it, all I can advise you,—is,—not to be in a hurry, and not to be too slow. Say as little as you can, and let that little go as far as possible to meet the exact point of the question put to you; and above all, never get out of temper. If it happens, my dear, that even I puzzle you, don't forget that I am fighting for the prisoner, and that you are a witness for the prosecution. You see, now, Mrs. Fairleigh," he added, with a laugh, "into what a position you have driven me to-day. Man and wife on opposite sides, in the same suit!"

"But I am on no side but that of truth," she protested; "and if you cross-question and mystify me, I shall say you are a cruel, bad man."

"And I," interrupts Jennie, "shall say, A righteous Daniel come to judgment."

"I must be in court this morning," added the barrister, "as there is no knowing what

chance points of detail may come out in cross-examining these smuggling fellows—possibly something to help me. So, farewell to both of you. Make a good luncheon, be sure to be in court before ‘Two,’ and ask for me.”

To both the ladies the morning was intolerably long; but it came to an end at last, and a few minutes before two they were safely ensconced in a quiet corner of the court, just as the jury returned to their places.

It was Hester’s first visit to a court of Justice,—and though there was nothing very imposing in the building itself, there were many details which at once arrested her attention. Opposite to her, on a little dais raised close to the wall, sat the judge, an oldish man, apparently; with a broad, massive forehead, in which thought seemed to have cut many deep furrows, but with a fire and intelligence in his eyes that told of

vigour in its full prime. Away to his right, in a little gallery by themselves, were the jury ; in front of them, as in the pit of a theatre, a few scores of spectators, with an inner circle or two of barristers, lawyers, and witnesses, or special visitors ; while immediately to the right of the judge, and facing the jury, a small space was railed off, in which now stood a few policemen and an officer of the court, and from which a narrow flight of stairs zig-zagged down to various offices, cells, and strong rooms on the ground-floor.

Hester had barely completed a hasty survey of the whole scene, and was whispering to Jennie the name of the judge (which her husband had told her), when an officer of the court shouted out the word, "Silence," in a stentorian voice ; some preliminaries were gone through, people in the pit sat down, there was a rustle among legal papers, and suddenly, not ten yards

away, in the little railed-off space, stood the prisoner, Thomas Russell, between two policemen, who had brought him up by those zig-zag stairs. Other preliminaries were gone through, the jury were sworn, and the trial began. The prisoner pleaded "Not guilty," and, amidst a profound silence, the counsel for the Crown opened the case.

There is no need here to recapitulate facts already known to the reader, and all that need be said is that the indictment, as framed by the Crown, was a very fair and temperate one, embracing no points with which he is not acquainted.

The whole case for the prosecution, with the examination of one or two Preventive-men, and Hester herself, lasted about a couple of hours, and the leading counsel's address being concluded, Hester Fairleigh was called to be examined as the final witness.

The junior counsel, Mr. Dormer, who conducted this part of the case, was counted a keen, sharp, hand at cross-examination, and his short, jerky, abrupt manner at first rather troubled Hester; but she remembered her husband's express caution, and showed no trace whatever of being in any way annoyed or puzzled. The consequence of this was that Mr. Dormer grew more and more polite as his work drew to a close, and he complimented the witness on the good sense and readiness with which she had replied to all his queries. "I shall not," he concluded, "detain you now, Mrs. Fairleigh, more than a few minutes."

"The prisoner, I believe, Mrs. Fairleigh, at one time enjoyed the great privilege of being a friend of yours?"

"He was a visitor at my father's house for many years."

"Exactly,—and so had every chance of becoming well-known to you in per-

sonal appearance, manner, voice, and in dress ?”

“Certainly.”

“And this continued very nearly up to the date of the crime now laid against the prisoner ?”

“He was away at sea for some years, and on his return I saw little of Mr. Russell.”

“Still, you did see him occasionally ? Often enough to notice any change that might have occurred in his personal appearance ?”

“I saw him once or twice.”

“The friendship or intimacy of which you spoke, then, was not continued on its old footing ? Now I will not ask a single question as to why this happened, for, unhappily for the prisoner, the jury have already heard abundant reasons why such an intimacy would inevitably be broken off by a lady in your position. I will only assume that the prisoner’s recent course of

life was such as to bring upon him the loss of your good opinion. Am I so far right?"

"Decidedly."

"And you noticed a decided change in him for the worse?"

"Yes, so far as his manner was concerned; but any change in his habits or mode of life I only knew, of course, from ordinary report."

"And public opinion spoke pretty strongly, if justly, on this point?"

"That is a matter," replied Hester, "on which your own judgment will be better able to form an opinion than mine."

This was not encouraging to Mr. Dormer, but he rashly persevered,—

"Knowing the change for the worse that had taken place in him, and how much he was said to be mixed up in such lawless expeditions as these smugglers were engaged in, he seemed to you a likely man enough to commit the crime charged against him?"

“Certainly not.”

“Yet, when you saw the fatal blow struck—as you have already told the jury, you *did* see it—the idea instantly crossed your mind that it was the prisoner who struck it?”

“A suspicion—only a suspicion—that the dress of the person was in some way familiar to me.”

“And the general appearance of the man was like that of the prisoner?”

“Not unlike him in height; a chance——”

But here the witness suddenly paused, as she accidentally found her husband’s eyes fixed on her, and again remembered his caution about “few words.”

“Pray go on, Mrs. Fairleigh,” said her examiner; “pray go on. The jury will be most glad to hear your further words as to ‘a chance.’”

Then Hester ended her sentence in a fashion far different from her original intention.

"A chance resemblance, possibly," she said, "and of no weight in such a matter as this."

"Did you recognise his voice?"

"It was impossible where I stood hidden, in the roar of wind and waters, to hear any voice clearly, or indeed to distinguish any words."

"But you were able to distinguish the face of the prisoner?"

"Pardon me," replied Hester, "I am not aware that it was the prisoner. But in any case, I could not clearly make out the face of the person who struck the murdered man."

"Look, then, Mrs. Fairleigh, at the prisoner, as he stands now before you; does his face not recall that of the person whom you describe?"

"Certainly not."

"Will you swear that he is not the man whom you saw?"

“That I cannot swear ; but neither can I swear that he is the person whom I saw striking the fatal blow. On the contrary, as I now look at him, many points of difference occur to me.”

Luckily for Hester, Mr. Dormer did not see fit to ask what these points of difference were, or she might have been puzzled to express them in words. But she was not yet released, as it was now the turn for the counsel on the other side, if they thought fit, to cross-examine her ; and for this purpose her husband now rose.

“You have told the jury,” he said, “that when you saw the fatal blow struck, a suspicion crossed your mind that the dress of the man who struck it was in some way familiar to you. Now, when you had set free Captain Langley and the Preventive-men from the cords which bound them, did you mention this suspicion of yours to any one of the party ? ”

"No, I did not."

"That seems strange. Can you at all account for not doing so?"

"The terror and excitement of the whole scene were too great for me. As far as I can recollect, I scarcely held any conversation at all, even with my father, but to explain how I chanced to be there, and to beg for guidance on my way home."

"Did anyone of the party mention a like suspicion to you?"

"No one."

Then Hester was told that she might sit down; and Mr. Fairleigh, having briefly questioned one or two of the other witnesses, began his reply in defence of the prisoners. His speech was short, clear, and to the point.

He commenced by saying that he could not, and did not, in any way complain of the opening speech of his learned brother, the counsel for the prosecution; nor of Mr.

Dormer's supplementary work, nor of any of the cross-examination which followed. He freely admitted that their desire and object, like his own, were simply that justice should be done. "They claim justice on behalf of the murdered man, his widow, and fatherless children—and God forbid that justice should be denied them!—but I claim justice on behalf of the prisoner at the bar, against whom, I contend, there is no such evidence as will for a moment warrant conviction of the capital charge laid against him."

Then, having once more briefly stated the facts, he contended that the case was one of suspicion, and suspicion only; no one witness had sworn, or could swear, that the prisoner had been seen present during the lawless struggle between the smugglers and the Preventive-men, or during the flight and capture that followed; though the accused must have been well-known to many that were engaged in it, and could

easily have been recognised. And on bare suspicion of this kind, however strong, he felt convinced that the jury would never condemn a man to the gallows.

Fairleigh called but one witness for the defence, and this was little Sam Roper, his landlord, who swore to the prisoner's general deportment on the day after the alleged murder, as utterly unlike that of a man guilty of so terrible a crime.

His evidence was merely of negative value, and the counsel for the Crown declined to cross-examine him. But having by this witness's appearance gained the right of reply, he now went on to contend that he had clearly made out the following points against the prisoner :—That he was in the habit of joining in lawless enterprises, such as the one in which Akers had met with his death ; that he had been seen near the spot but a short time before the murder ; that the fatal blow had been struck by a

person wearing a dress resembling the prisoner's, and like him in height and general appearance ; and above all, that the accused had declined to say where and how he had been engaged at the exact time of the murder ; nor had the counsel for the defence, nor any one of the witnesses, attempted to give any explanation on this fatal point. "I leave it, therefore, to you, gentlemen of the jury, now to decide how far this strange and terrible silence is compatible with any theory of innocence ; concerning which," he added, "you will have to decide what worth is to be attached to the prisoner's sole statement as to the cap and jacket, so often alluded to, which he swears he did not wear on the fatal day, seeing that they were stolen from him while bathing some months before ; a loss, be it observed, which he mentioned to no human being at that, or any subsequent, time until now, when he is at his wits' end to account for their being

found in somebody else's wearing, and that person guilty of the crime of which he himself is accused. If the prisoner were not guilty of the crime laid to his charge, he would instantly, at all hazards, prove an *alibi*. But he is silent, and his silence only serves to arm every suspicion against him with tenfold force."

For a few minutes after the conclusion of his speech, a sudden and deep stillness spread over the whole court, and every eye was fixed on the prisoner, who it was then thought would then say some words in explanation or defence of his previous refusal to explain where and how he had been engaged at the time of the murder. But though he apparently quailed under their gaze, and for a moment moved his lips as if he were about to speak, not a word escaped him ; the buzz of conversation again resumed its sway, and then the judge rose to sum up the case to the jury.

His charge was short, clear, and eminently impartial. He made the utmost of all the points urged by the prosecution, but he omitted not one advanced by the defence. He showed to the jury the true worth of circumstantial evidence, dwelt for a moment on the dress said to have been stolen from the prisoner, and afterwards worn by the person seen to strike the blow that caused Akers' death. And finally, he left it to them to determine what deduction must be drawn from the prisoner's obstinate refusal to say where he was, if not engaged in the act of lawless violence charged against him. Lastly, he told them the law as to the crime itself, which,—if they believed him to be guilty, and taking into account the bitter animus felt and displayed by the prisoner against Captain Langley and his men,—clearly amounted to murder.

Then the jury retired to consider their verdict, the judge to get some luncheon,

while the whole court woke up into a sudden state of busy comment and whisper as to the probable fate of the prisoner, who, at his own request, was conveyed back to the apartment from which he had been brought, still guarded by the two policemen.

Hester and Jennie Moreton, pale with excitement, and worn out with anxiety, at last found time to exchange a word or two ; but each looked vainly in the other's face for a ray of hope or encouragement. Their words were few and cheerless ; nor was their terrible suspense lessened when they observed Mr. Fairleigh suddenly push his way out from among the crowd of lawyers and leave the court.

They could not ; but we must at once follow him.

A note had just been put into his hand, containing a scrap of paper, on which were written the following words,—

"We've found old Madge. Come directly."—T. D.

Fairleigh had read this over a dozen times, and could make little of it. He knew nothing of "Madge"—not even who she was, much less where she was to be found. In fact, he believed it was too late for anything to be done. But still, in a sort of desperation, he had at once hastened out of court.

The first person that caught his eye at the doorway was Tom Davis himself, who had clearly been drinking, and had been refused admittance into the court by the policeman on duty.

Seizing him by the arm, Fairleigh led the half-drunken man away from the door, into a small yard attached to the building, where they would at all events be out of earshot.

"You rascal," he said, "you have been drinking; what is the meaning of this foolery?" (showing him the piece of paper.)

"Never you mind the drink, master;

we've got old Madge, and she and me have agreed to square the ten pound. I knows what I'm about, and so do she."

"But who on earth is old Madge, and where is she?"

"You come along o' me, and I'll show'e where she be."

Thus adjured, but still puzzled as to what the fellow really had to say, Fairleigh followed his guide down a narrow lane at the back of the Court-house, thence through three or four squalid, dirty, streets, and finally to a piece of waste ground on the bank of a canal, where, by the roadside, under shelter of a few stunted thorn-trees, a travelling tinker had pitched his tent, and was at work on an old kettle. Hard by was an empty cart, a ragged pony, and a handful of scrabbly hay, which, if truth must be told, our old friend Madge had just abstracted from a neighbouring stack.

"Here's the master hisself, Madge," said

Davis, "and now you tell he what you know about the job under the cliff."

The dialogue that followed occupied only a few minutes, but at the close of it Fairleigh said eagerly to the woman,—

"If you will come and swear to this before the judge, you may be in time to save a man's life ; and no harm can possibly come to you or to your people. If in time, I promise you five pounds more, beside what you and Davis may have agreed on. But not a moment is to be lost. Even now it may be too late."

Hurrying back with all speed, they soon reached the doorway from which the half-drunken man had been just before ejected, which was still guarded by the same janitor.

"Have the jury come back into court, policeman ?" said Fairleigh.

"No, sir," replied the man, touching his hat to the barrister, who at that moment suddenly became aware that he was still in

wig and gown, and that all eyes were fixed on his strange companion.

“Keep an eye, then, on this drunken fellow, and take charge of the woman who will presently, I hope, be wanted in the witness-box.” Then Fairleigh went off in hot haste to communicate with the judge.

In ten minutes, to everybody’s amazement, his lordship suddenly stood up in court, ordered silence to be proclaimed, and sent a special message to the jury, begging their instant attendance.

The news that a strange witness had turned up at the last moment, and that the jury were recalled, had spread like wildfire. Lawyers, barristers, witnesses, and idlers of all kinds had rushed back into court, as, amid a profound silence, the judge again rose to speak.

For a moment, as he hastened back to his place, Hester had caught one glance of her husband’s eye, and that one glance had

served to set her heart beating in terrible suspense.

"What does it all mean, Jennie," she whispered; "is it good news or bad?"

"Good, Hessy, good; it must be good, or your husband would never have come back with his face full of light as it is now."

The prisoner was in his old place at the bar, pale as death, and with a sad and weary look of despair stamped upon his face, as of one who believes all hope to be gone.

"Gentlemen of the jury," said his lordship, "in sending for you at such a time, I am perhaps following an unusual course, but one which I am now bound to adopt in the express furtherance of justice. At the last moment a witness has come forward with evidence, I am told, of the most important kind, which may materially affect your verdict. Let Madge Smith be called."

Having been duly sworn, she deposed, in brief, as follows :

Her name was Madge Smith, and she belonged to a tribe of gipsies that had been about Lipscombe and the Dingle Farm for years past. She knew the prisoner at the bar ; had known him ever since he was a boy. She knew that a cargo had been run, and some of her own people had been mixed up in it. She knew the man who struck down Akers. He was one of the Rommany folks. She would swear she knew him well. Refused to give his name, or say where he was. Let the look-out men find him if they could. Yes, he did wear a cap with a gold band and a round jacket. They were, she believed, the prisoner's ; had been picked up by the river-side by her "chabo," and one of her people had got hold of them, and worn them on the day of the row on the beach. What for ? That she couldn't tell. They had better find him themselves, and

ask him. Was she going to be paid for giving this witness? Well, she hoped so. But, whether she was paid or not, what she had sworn to was the truth. What should a poor gipsy-woman tell a lie for? She remembered the prisoner coming down to their place, months and months ago, and making a fuss about the cap and jacket; but one of her people had got them, and wouldn't give them up because the Captain cut-up rough.

This was all that could be extracted from her, though cross-examined by counsel on both sides, and to this statement she steadily adhered. After a few more words from the judge, the jury again retired, and after a short absence came back into court with a verdict of "NOT GUILTY."

Thomas Russell was therefore once more brought up to the bar, severely cautioned by the judge, and told that he was free, unless the counsel for the Crown intended

to prefer any other indictment against him.

This they declined to do, and the prisoner, to his utter amazement, was told he was free to go at once.

But although Fairleigh was on the watch for him when the court broke up, he managed to escape unrecognised among the crowd, and not a trace of him could be found, in spite of all inquiry among the policemen and other officials. All they knew was that he had slipped out at once, in his prison dress, and in the dusk of the evening made off into the city unnoticed.

One dinner-table that night, at the London Inn, was a joyful one indeed. Hester and Jennie, after their long and terrible suspense, were in the highest possible spirits, and never weary of praising Mr. Counsellor Fairleigh for his able speech.

"He's a worthless dog, I fear," was his answer, "though I said what I could for

him. But as to his escape, he owes it all to that drunken fellow, Tom Davis, whom I was obliged to get locked-up till he is sober again. If he had not found out old Madge, nothing could have saved Mr. Thomas Russell from being now in the condemned cell."

Little Sam Roper, too, at Jennie's special request, was one of the party, he having come up to Exeter to make a column for the next Gazette; and been one of the first, as they left the court, to congratulate Fairleigh on his success.

"You would make your fortune, sir, on this circuit," said the old man. "You *must* put on wig and gown again."

"Ask Mrs. Fairleigh, my friend, what she thinks of that plan."

"I?" said Hester, "I forbid it entirely. He may fail the next time."

CHAPTER X.

WHERE IS HE ?

THE next day the whole party travelled homewards, and things soon fell into their old track, both in Hester's quiet household and at the Rosery.

The Captain, in high spirits at the conviction of the smugglers, was startled, and seemingly not specially pleased at the news of Russell's acquittal, as he made no secret of declaring.

"I'll bet a sovereign," he said, "in spite of judge and jury, that the fellow was somewhere close at hand, and had a taste of the cargo that night."

"Little doubt of that," replied Fairleigh ;

“but, my dear Captain, don’t forget that he was tried for murder, and *that* we proved he did not commit.”

“Lucky for him, then, I was] not on the jury. I would never have given in.”

To the two women who had worked so hard on his behalf, of course Russell’s acquittal had been a cause of real joy ; to Hester, on her cousin’s account, to Jennie on her own. Many and many a long talk was held as to where he could be, and why he should be hiding himself ; but month after month passed away, and nothing was seen or heard of him. Old Madge and all her people had left the neighbourhood, and were away on one of their usual rounds at the other end of the county ; and Tom Davis, who after his escapade had sobered down again to regular work, was consulted in vain. No tidings of any value could be gathered ; and the mate of the *Lapwing* began to be forgotten even by the gossips of Lipscombe ;

though one heart there beat as truly for him as ever.

“My dear Hessy,” said its owner, “I shall never be content till he has with his own lips thanked the man who saved him from the gallows ; and, please God, he shall some day do it yet. He has been saved, and he shall prove that he was worth saving.”

“At all events, you think so, Jennie, and that is more than he deserves.”

And so time rolled on, spring ripened into summer, and summer faded into autumn ; but nothing was heard of the whereabouts of Thomas Russell, save by one person, and that one was his old companion, Sam Roper, who had received a letter from the wanderer, the contents of which, for a wonder, he kept to himself.

But, at one paragraph in that letter, we must glance for a moment, as it serves to keep up the thread of our story :—

“As to my being acquitted, Roper, all I

wish is that I owed it to any other man but the one who spoke for me. He always hated me, and he hates me now. He never believed I was innocent all through the trial, till old Madge turned up, and then he could not help believing it, more than the wise-acres in the jury-box, though they little think what hand I had in the affair, after all. Why, man alive! I was *there*, close by, the whole time, half-way up the cliff, in a clump of furze. Old Langley and his two mates, at one time, were not fifty yards away from me—at the flag-staff—and my cap blew off and rolled down over the cliff, right before their eyes. I saw Hester Fairleigh come down the path. It was I who gave the signal for the boats to come in, as soon as I found that the old man had only got five or six hands to help him. I saw them all tied up, like so many mummies, and laid head and heels on the beach; and as soon as the row was over, I was away across

country with the other fellows, and in the barn, when the sharks broke in upon us, and sent us all flying over hedge and ditch across Roborough Down. By Jove! Roper, I had a narrow chance of it that night, and you would have stared if you had seen me creep into the old place in High Street at two in the morning, without a hat, covered with mud, and hardly a shoe to my foot. Lucky for me was it that I knew every lane and hedge and short cut on my way across country.

“Old Madge was a tramp at last. I thought that the old woman wouldn’t fail me, and she is a tramp now. All these months I have been on the tramp with the Rommany people—tinkering, horse-dealing, at fairs and races, and what not; without a sixpence in my pocket but what I worked for, and made welcome to the best they have to give (which, by the way, is not always strictly their own), out in all weathers,

and sometimes too near a taste of the jail to be pleasant. And the long and short of it is, that I have had enough of this life for the present, and begin to think what is to be done next. The *Lapwing* is out of reach now, but another ship is to be found, I suppose, and I must take my chance once more at sea. I shall, as soon as possible, get away from these people, and run down to Liverpool, if I can raise funds enough ; and then don't be surprised if all at once I turn up in High Street. My traps are all safe with you, I know. Take care of them for me, as I may have to sell them all off (except the old fowling-piece over the fire-place), and then start for a long cruise. Don't attempt to answer this scrawl, for we are always on the move, and I may be fifty miles away before your answer could reach me. Say nothing about me or my doings to any one at Lipscombe, unless it be to J. M., the only friend left, except yourself, who cares a rap

whether I am alive or dead. Her I can trust."

"Well!" said the old man to himself, after reading the letter, "if *he* trusts the lady, it's clear I must do the same; the only difficulty will be to find a chance of telling my story unknown to the Captain."

If he had but known how eagerly and anxiously Jennie Moreton had waited, all through those weary months, for a single word of tidings about the lost sheep, he would have counted, and found, his task a far easier one. More than once he had called at the Rosery, but, as luck would have it, the master of the house was always at home, and the slightest hint of a letter would have subjected Roper to a cross-questioning that must have betrayed his secret.

But, at last, chance threw in his way the opportunity he sought.

"If I were you," Hester had said to her one day, "I would call on the little Editor,

and ask him point-blank if he has heard of this scape-grace of yours? If Russell has written to any one, depend on it, Roper is the man."

"The scape-grace is not mine, Mrs. Fairleigh, and I am not in the habit of calling on unmarried gentlemen. I haven't the face to do it, Hessy."

"My dear, the man is old enough to be your father."

"But he is Paul Pry all the same; and if Mrs. Grundy should only once hear of my calling in High Street, I should never hear the last of it."

"But what else can be done, Jennie?"

To this question Jennie could find no answer, though, for many a day, it haunted her with unwearied pertinacity. One morning, however, after an hour's shopping in Lipscombe, she chanced to pass the house just as Roper was coming out, and it was scarcely possible to avoid speaking to him.

He bowed in his old-fashioned, gallant, fashion, and then quietly walked with her down the street.

"I am in luck's way, Miss Moreton. For weeks past I have been on the look-out for you, and now, just when in despair, chance gives me good fortune which I never hoped for."

"Looking out for me, Mr. Roper? Why, I saw you but a few days ago at the Rosery!" says Miss Innocence.

"Quite true," replies the Editor; "but that was in the presence of my good friend the Captain; and what I have to say is only for your private ear. If you will allow me, Miss Jennie, I will now walk with you on your way home, and we can be as private as need be, in spite of all the young fellows who are envying me my good luck, and all the gossips who are wondering what on earth an old fellow like me can have to say to so charming a listener!"

Then, as briefly as might be, he told her the contents of the letter, and her bright eyes and glowing cheek told how eagerly she listened to it.

“Not a soul in Lipscombe knows of it but we two,” added Roper, “and you, Miss Jennie, he specially says, he can trust.”

“Tell him,” she answered, “that ——”

“Ah! there lies the rub, my dear young friend—I can’t tell him anything. He may be at Liverpool or John o’Groats by this time, in a gipsy tent, or on board ship, for all I know.”

“But, sooner or later, you will see him, or hear from him, Mr. Roper. Then be sure to tell him this. As he trusts me, and believes in what I have done for him, *I trust him* not to leave England without coming here to see me. I want no thanks; but I have that to say which he must hear, and he has that to do which, if he has a bit of heart left in him, he is bound to do. I shall be-

lieve in none of his pretended gratitude, if he fails me. Give him that message word for word, as far as you can ; and keep my secret for me, Mr. Roper, as truly as you have kept his. God bless you for helping me to save him from further ruin."

By this time they had got well out of the town, and reached the corner of the lane leading down to the Rosery.

"Keep your secret, Miss Jennie ?" said the old man. "It's an honour and a pleasure to be trusted with such tender and true words as yours. I will keep it in my heart of hearts, old and tough as Paul Pry may be ; and if that fellow, Tom Russell, doesn't turn over a new leaf when he hears it, may the sharks devour him, body and soul, the next time he gets into trouble."

Then the old man, as he lifted his hat to her again, gallantly raised her hand to his lips, and wished her good-bye.

"Good-bye," he said, "Miss Jennie ; I

need not wish you fair weather, for you carry sunshine in your face; and brighter days are not far off—for you, if not for him. Depend on it, if he shows his face in Lipscombe, you shall see him without fail.”

With these words ringing in her ears, Jennie Moreton went down the hill to the Rosery gate, with a lighter heart than she had known for many a day.

A week after this, as Roper sat one evening smoking his final pipe after supper, all at once he was startled from his reverie by a dash of sand against the window. It was an old and well-known signal, and he recognised it at once. Slipping quietly downstairs, he softly opened the door, and there looked hard and suspiciously at the strange creature that stood before him in the dim light.

Ragged in dress, with scarcely a shoe to his foot, and starvation written on his face, there stood the wreck of his old companion.

"Hush !" said a faint, hollow voice. "It's me. Open the door, or I shall drop."

"Good God ! Russell !—is it,—can it be you ? Come in, come in."

Then the two crept softly upstairs, and, as luck would have it, unheard by the servant, who, indeed, was busy with her sweetheart at the back-door, and alive to the possibility of no casualty but that of being herself surprised at her devotions.

"Before I can tell you anything, Roper, give me a morsel of bread and meat, and some brandy."

This was soon done, for the supper still lay spread on the table, and the wanderer ate and drank as only a famished man can do. But he stopped at last, and then declared he was ready and willing to talk.

"Not a single word this night, Russell—not one word," said the old man, eagerly. "The first thing is to pull off these scarecrow rags of yours, get a few decent clothes

out of your own cupboard, and then let the servant see you decently dressed. Then you shall retire, in due course, to your own bed, and get up to-morrow as a respectable inhabitant of Lipscombe ; when, if you please, you can tell *me* the story of your vagabond life for the last three months or so."

The first part of the business was soon managed. The ragged clothes were got off, and, for the time, stuffed into a carpet-bag ; Mr. Tom Russell was decently clad in a suit from his own portmanteau, and even thus equipped was a sufficient surprise to the servant when she came to remove the supper tray.

"God bless 'ee, sir," said old Jane, "I had no notion that Mr. Russell was a—come—back !"

"No," replied Roper, "nor had I, till about an hour ago, when he all at once dropped in to supper. But now, the best thing to be done is to get ready his bed

and room ; and as to breakfast, that may stand over until ten to-morrow morning. Mr. Russell has had a long journey, and can bear any amount of sleep."

The amount of sleep which he took that night was not a prodigious one, considering his scanty acquaintance with any bed during the previous week ; and at eleven o'clock the next morning Mr. Thomas Russell had breakfasted, and was ready, as he said, to make a clean breast of it.

"My dear Roper," were his first words, when they were alone, "in the first place, I am a beggar. With the exception of the clothes on my back, the old sea-chest upstairs, a score or two of books, and the old fowling-piece there over the chimney, I haven't sixpence to bless myself with. And so, like a bad shilling, I have drifted back to my own parish."

"I don't know," interrupts his host, "why all bad shillings should come back to Lips-

combe, or why you should not pass current, now that you are here. But go on with your story."

"Short, Roper, and soon told. You remember my letter? Well, I set about raising the funds at once, and worked hard; but the very moment the Rommany people found out that I wanted to leave them, there was an end of all civil words between us. As long as I stayed with them, all was right; but as soon as I wanted to go, all was wrong. At last, however, I managed to give them the slip one evening, and made my way to Exeter. That cost me my last shilling—and when I set out upon the Totness road, I had not even a copper left. I had nothing for it but to beg, or do worse, for the three days it has taken me to reach Lipscombe. I did an odd job or two on my way, where I could get one; but the worst of that was that it made me ravenously hungry, and I ate more than I earned. So, then, I pushed

on as well as I could, and tried cold water for dinner, for tea, for supper. When I got here last night, I had not broken my fast with anything solid since eight in the morning. What I was like, you know."

"Like ? You were as much like a scarecrow as could well be alive, except for your beard and moustache, which, by the way, rather improve you. But you must get them trimmed, and rather less like Robinson Crusoe, especially as there is a lady most anxiously waiting to see you."

"To see *me*, Roper ? Then she will have to wait. I have done with woman-kind for the present, root and branch."

"Not this lady, Tom ; if ever a man in this world was bound to go down on his knees to thank a friend for his life, you are that man, and Miss Jennie Moreton is the woman. Where would you now have been but for her ?"

To this query Russell made no answer; and his friend, therefore, went rapidly, and somewhat angrily, on.

“Well, we won’t discuss that last point, Russell; but I will give you her message, word for word, as she gave it to me. ‘Tell him,’ she said, ‘as he trusts me, and believes in what I have done for him, *I trust him* not to leave England without coming to see me. I don’t want any thanks, but I have that to say which he must hear, and he has that to do which, if he has a bit of heart left in him, he is bound to do. I shall believe in none of his gratitude, if he fails me.’ There! Mr. Gipsy-sailor, that is the message; and if you had seen the flashing eyes that sparkled with her words, and the glowing cheek of the girl that spoke them, you wouldn’t be shilly-shallying here for a single day. If you’re a man, Tom, you are bound to see her, at once. Such love as hers is better than fine gold.”

“How can I see her, Roper? She cannot come here—that’s clear. And I cannot face the Captain—upon my life! I can’t. He only believes, even now, that I got off by a ‘fluke.’”

“Never mind, man! what *he* believes. *She* believes you are not guilty, and has risked and done all that a woman could dare to save you from ruin. She trusts you, and the least you can do is to trust her. I will take care to let her know you are in the neighbourhood. All you have to do is to take your gun, and go down into the wood beyond the Rosery, and trust to a woman’s wit to find you out, without nod or wink to the Captain.”

“I do trust her,” replied Russell, starting up at these eager words, “and I will go down to the wood to-morrow, without fail. Tell her I promise this.”

“No time like the present, Tom; I will write at once, and post the letter with my

To this query Russell made no answer; and his friend, therefore, went rapidly, and somewhat angrily, on.

"Well, we won't discuss that last point, Russell; but I will give you her message, word for word, as she gave it to me. 'Tell him,' she said, 'as he trusts me, and believes in what I have done for him, *I trust him* not to leave England without coming to see me. I don't want any thanks, but I have that to say which he must hear, and he has that to do which, if he has a bit of heart left in him, he is bound to do. I shall believe in none of his gratitude, if he fails me.' There! Mr. Gipsy-sailor, that is the message; and if you had seen the flashing eyes that sparkled with her words, and the glowing cheek of the girl that spoke them, you wouldn't be shilly-shallying here for a single day. If you're a man, Tom, you are bound to see her, at once. Such love as hers is better than fine gold."

that day, they made no sign. His long, rough, tangled hair and beard so completely changed his outward appearance, that they had some excuse for their want of discernment ; but there was, nevertheless, some truth in his bitter words to himself, "If I had come home with my pockets full of gold, they would have found me out, in spite of my beard, quickly enough."

Here and there he got a stray nod, or a wave of the hand, from the opposite side of the street ; but Lipscombe in general was content to let him go his own way unnoticed, or with a stare of unmixed surprise and wonder.

He made his way, however, safely to the shop of "Cudlip," the barber, who welcomed him at first merely as a profitable customer ; but a few minutes later, when fully under tonsorial sway, by his real name.

"Beg pardon, sir, I'm sure, for not knowin' you at first ; but so many foreign gents comes

in now from the harbour to be brushed up, that one lets a friend go by, as it were. Hope I see you well, sir ?”

“ All right, Cudlip.”

Then followed a long, broken gossip, of which the fag-end alone need come under our notice.

“ Hope Mr. Roper’s well, sir. He sims to be gettin’ quite sprightly again.”

“ Why *again*, Cudlip ? There has been nothing the matter with him lately ? ”

“ No, sir ; but Mr. Roper an’t so young as he were, and he have freshened up wonderful this last six months. Bless you, sir, he goes by this here door, he do, of a mornin’, with a pink in his button-hole, like a young cock-linnet, straight up the road to the lady’s house. And they do say, sir, that he have sold off the ‘ *Goolden Airyphonics*,’ and the *Gazette*’s going by private contrack.”

“ And who is the happy woman, Cudlip ? ”

“ Law ! you ’aven’t heard that much ?

Ah ! I forgot you was a stranger like. Why, it's in everybody's mouth a'most. Miss Fairleigh—up here—the Squire's sister—so they say, sir, so they say. But, mind 'ee, I knows nothin' about it. I listens, and says nothin'."

"Goes up the hill every day, Cudlip, does he ?"

"A goodish many times a week, sir ; but you'll be so good as not to mention my name, Mr. Russell, if *you* please, sir !"

With this scrap of news, Russell took his leave ; and his talk that evening with his old friend over their pipe was, now and then, seasoned with a grain of salt that the old man did not at all expect.

CHAPTER X.

AT LAST.

As the clock struck four, on the following afternoon, Jennie Moreton was crossing the river by the stepping-stones, above the Rosery meadows ; and thence made her way into the half-mile of tangled copse dignified by the name of Lipscombe Wood. Through this wood ran a winding central path, following more or less the bend of the river, and from it zigzagged at intervals still narrower and more tangled pathlets, among which it was not difficult to lose one's way. But Jennie knew every green-road, path, and tangled brake of the district far better than she knew Lipscombe streets, and soon

found herself in the main road, where she took up her station under an old oak tree—a favourite haunt of her own and Hester's in other and happier days. It was one of the few large trees in the copse, with an open space cleared round it which no one could approach without being easily seen; and here she determined to wait.

The sun was still an hour or two from setting, and his cheery light fell on patches of golden and ruddy foliage all round her, in strong contrast with the deep shadow in which she stood. Birds flitted to and fro in the brake, bees were busy in the honeysuckle and latest blossom of the bramble; and high above her head, in the clear, bright air, she could hear the song of the lark winging its way to heaven. All else was still but the faint murmur of the river in the valley, hastening down to the blue sea. The beauty and peace of the whole scene accorded well with Jennie's thoughts, as they wandered

back to the days of childhood ; the lights and shadows, cares and joy which had since then fallen across her path. But her pleasant reverie was soon broken up by a sudden, quick, step among the neighbouring bushes, as a young man with a gun on his shoulder emerged into the main path.

In a moment, before she really recognised the new comer, her heart told her who it was, changed as he was in almost every point of outward appearance. She had last seen him in the dock, pale, haggard, and woe-begone. Now he stood before her, brown as an autumn nut, in full health, bearded, and with a light in his eye that told of hope and new life.

She stepped forward at once, and shook him by the hand, as she said,—

“I thought you would come, and I thank you for coming,”

“Nay,” he answered, “the thanks must be from me, Jennie; thanks to you for

safety, for life, and for once more trusting me."

"I want no thanks, Mr. Russell ; I deserve none. I only set the wheels in motion ; and, though by God's help I did my part, your life, your safety, your chance of a fresh start you owe not to me, but to a good, brave, generous man, who, for my sake and Hester's, set to work when all hope seemed gone, and death stared you in the face."

"And have you sent for me," he answered, in an angry tone, "merely to tell this story over again, and to sing praises to the hero of such good deeds ? Why, he hates the very ground I tread on."

"No," she answered, "not for that very purpose ; not to sing his praises, or to make a hero of anyone. But that you may see and know how good and true a friend he has been to you, and that you yourself may go like a man of honour and of a good heart, and thank him for what he has done.

It is for this I have sent for you ; and done what perhaps many will condemn as an unwomanly thing, because I am unwilling you should be looked on as heartless and thankless in the eyes of any that have worked for you as Mr. Fairleigh has. As for his hatred, if he hated you as you say, why did he find money for your lawyer—why go at a minute's notice to Exeter to plead for you—why not have left you to your fate in jail ? *that* was certain enough to please your bitterest enemy."

"But it was Madge that saved me, after all, Jennie."

"But it was your enemy," she answered eagerly, "who set to work and hunted out Madge, who paid a man to find her, who bribed her to speak, when, if she had chosen to be silent for another hour, it would have been too late. And don't call me 'Jennie,' Mr. Russell, or pretend to be grateful to me, when you scorn the true friend that saved

you. I am 'Jennie' only to those who love and respect me and mine ; and my friends must be yours, if you would have me for a friend at all. Thomas Russell," she added, in a soft, clear voice, after her passionate out-break, "at this very moment, in your heart of hearts, you know that what I have said is the bare truth. Deny it if you can. At all events, talk like this is worse than useless, and cannot go on. Speak, now, once and for all ; will you do my bidding, or not ? Are we two to be friends, or to part here, and part for ever ?"

"Friends, friends," he eagerly replied. "God knows I have not so many friends left as to lose the best of them. What is it you want me to do ?"

"Easily told, and soon done, my friend ; for so I can now call you. Go with me at once to the Manor-house, and thank the man who saved your life. I shall know, then, that your heart is not all dead ; that

you mean to blot out the bitter past, and live to show me that what I did was worth the doing, since it opens to you a future of happiness and honour."

Tears started into her happy eyes as she uttered these glowing words—tears that she would fain have hidden, but he was quick to see, and against which he was no longer proof.

"Jennie," he cried at last, "you have made a man of me at last; thank God for your loving words. Only give me the right to call you Jennie, and all that a man can do to win and be worthy of a woman's love I swear shall be done for you. I swear to it, heart and soul. You have trusted me so far; trust me a little longer."

What exact answer Jennie made to these eager words, or in what exact and happy fashion lips sealed the happy contract in which they ended, the reader must guess

for himself. Woman's love had triumphed, as, when pure, it ever does triumph.

In a few minutes the two were on their way back to the river, by one of the rough and tangled paths once traversed by Russell under very different circumstances, that even now recurred to his mind as he followed his loving guide.

It was, perhaps, this sudden reverie into which he had fallen that made him carry his gun with less than his usual care. But however this might be, they had almost reached the river, Jennie but a few paces in front, and he eagerly following, and carrying on a broken but happy dialogue as they went, when the trigger of the fowling piece caught in some passing twig, there was a sudden and terrible report, and the young girl fell with a wild cry to the ground.

Russell, as he hurried up to the spot where she lay, at first thought she was

dead. But a moment's examination proved that this was not the case, though her arm was covered with blood. The charge had passed through a part of her dress, and a few stray shots had pierced the fleshy part of the arm. She had fainted under the sudden shock and terror of the wound, but in reality was little hurt; though a few inches in either direction might have made the wound a fatal one.

"O, my darling!" he cried, "do but speak—say but a single word, that I may know that you are alive. A curse seems to be on me, and I bring nothing but misery and misfortune with me wherever I go."

Then he rushed frantically off to the river, fetched water in his hat, and dashed it tenderly on her pale face. Then, at last, she opened her eyes, began to revive, and sat up; scarcely conscious as yet of what had happened. He raised her carefully from the ground, and to his delight found

that she could walk, though she had not uttered a word.

“Thank God, dearest, I am not a murderer! Can you ever forgive me, Jennie? For Heaven’s sake let me hear the sound of your voice.”

“Thank God, indeed!” she said, pulling up the sleeve of her dress, and showing her wounded arm; by His mercy I have escaped, the shot has touched me nowhere else; and in a moment or two I shall recover.”

“But, my dearest Jennie, you must go at once to the doctor and have your wound dressed. As for me, I shall never forgive myself—never; and as to this vile thing,” he added, “I did not even know it was loaded. It has lain for months and months in High Street, and, like a fool, I snatched it up in my haste this morning, without looking at it. But it shall never be loaded again, if I can prevent it.”

And then, as they got to the bank of the

river, he flung the unlucky cause of his troubles into the deepest part of the pool, where it sank to the bottom beyond all chance of discovery.

“And now, dearest, not one step shall you attempt to take across the river; the water will make you giddy, and I shall have to save you from drowning. You must trust yourself to my arms.”

There was no need to urge this request, for, indeed, she was utterly unable to attempt the passage from stone to stone, and trembled as she looked up into his pale, anxious face.

Lifting her up, therefore, tenderly in his arms, he bore her to the opposite bank, and they made their way slowly down towards the town.

“No human being need ever know,” she said, “what has happened but Dr. Andrews; he is an old friend whom I can trust. As for you, sir, you shall convey me safely to

the Cross Roads and leave me to find my way to the surgery. Meanwhile you must go straight off to the Manor-house, and do my bidding at once, without delay. Having done your best to kill me, you are bound to bring me new life by keeping your word to the very letter. You shall hear how I am without fail some time to-morrow. Now, begone !”

“ I will keep my word, Jennie, this very night. Give me one kiss before I go, and I swear to you to be true for ever.”

“ For ever,” she answered, “ is a long day. But I have given you my heart, and will trust you to the very end.”

Then she kissed him tenderly, and they parted.

Luckily for her, Jennie found her old friend at home, and in a few words told the cause of her sudden visit. The wound, after all, was but a trifling one ; the shot having gone completely through the flesh,

and thus caused considerable bleeding, but having done no serious harm.

“I will keep your secret, Miss Jennie,” said the kindly old man, “though that young scapegrace scarcely deserves it. It’s always the way with these sailor fellows—they will get meddling with loaded guns, and their best friends have the benefit of their bungling carelessness. Why doesn’t the fellow get a ship, and go off to his work like a man, if he ever means to get a grain of character again?”

“He shall get a ship before a month is past, Doctor. A thousand thanks for all your goodness. Not a word, remember, to the Captain, or to any one else, of what the bungler has done.”

“Honour bright, my dear—not a word. But stay,” he added, seeing how she still trembled in her first steps to the door, “you are in no fit state to walk. Wait but two minutes, and I will drive you as far as the

corner of the Rosery Lane. The carriage is coming round—here it is ; now, then, jump in.”

It was the happiest drive Jennie had known for many a long day ; for, though the Doctor had guessed more of her secret than she had chosen to tell, she knew she could trust him to keep it. She had saved the man she loved, and had loved for many a long year, from ruin ; she had won his heart in spite of himself ; she had roused him to a sense of shame and of past ingratitude, and led him at last to act like a man of honour. He should go to sea at once, and begin a new chapter in his life—a chapter of which neither need be ashamed. With these proud and happy thoughts in her heart, she wished her old friend good-night, and made her way down to the Rosery.

Luckily, the Captain had been detained by some business at Mousehole, and did not

return until late that night ; so that she had time to prepare for the meeting, and invent what excuse she could for her disabled arm.

“ Only a scratch,” she said, “ a rough scratch, I got among the brambles in the wood yesterday. It’s a mere nothing, and old Betty says she can cure it in a twinkle. So, pray, don’t pity me.”

And her words were so bright and ready, and her face was so lighted up with joyful spirit as she spoke, that the Captain swallowed the little falsehood without a grain of suspicion.

“ Well,” he answered, “ it doesn’t look like a mortal wound, Jennie ; so be off to Betty, and be cured.”

* * * * *

Meanwhile, dinner was over at the Manor-house, and Fairleigh sat chatting with his wife, in her own little sanctum, over the

contents of a box of books just arrived from Exeter.

Suddenly, a tap came to the door, and a servant entered.

"Please, sir, a gentleman wants to see you."

"What gentleman, Susan?"

"He wouldn't give no name, sir, and he looks like a forriner—with a big beard."

"Show him into my study, and say I will see him presently."

"Some old pensioner of Sarah's, I suppose, Hussy, with empty pockets, and a doubtful character, anxious for the good of the Sandwich Islanders. However, he shall not detain me long."

"Give him a shilling, and send him about his business, then, at once. He has no right to come here just when I want my new books unpacked."

"A shilling, my dear? He would feel himself horribly insulted by the offer of anything but gold, and beg me to consider

his position as a poor servant of the Lord, and my own duty as largely endowed with this world's goods. But I must not keep him waiting."

A long half-hour passed before Mr. Fairleigh returned to his box of books, and then he appeared with a look of pleasure on his face that completely puzzled his wife.

"Guess," he said, "guess, my dear, who my visitor was—an old friend of yours."

"Of mine? Nonsense. I never knew a foreigner with a beard. Guessing is of no use. Tell me the whole story, Henry, while I go on with my knitting."

She was busy on a tiny pair of socks of the finest and daintiest wool to be had in Lipscombe.

"All the same, Mrs. Fairleigh, an old friend of yours—a smart, handsome, young fellow, brown as a berry, and bearded like a pard. When I got into the room, I looked

him all over from head to foot, and saw in a moment he was no professional. His hands were clean, and he looked me full in the face.

“ ‘You don’t seem to know me, Mr. Fairleigh?’ he said.

“ ‘Well,’ replied I, ‘your voice sounds familiar enough; but, really, for the moment it puzzles me.’

“ ‘You last saw me in the prisoner’s dock at Exeter,’ he went on, ‘and *now* you are, I can see, more surprised than ever, Mr. Fairleigh, to find me here. I don’t wonder at it. After behaving to you as I have done, I have no right to enter the door of the Manor-house. But now that I am here, I may as well, with your permission, say why I have come.’

“ ‘Pray, do so,’ said I, ‘and pray sit down.’

“ ‘I came, Mr. Fairleigh, for two things; first,’—(here he stuck fast for a moment)—

‘first, to ask your pardon for spreading false reports concerning you, which I believed, and tried to make other people believe, were true. Secondly, I came to thank you for saving the life of a man who had slandered you, and who, but for you, might have died the death of a dog. I have been a long time in thus coming to my senses; but not long enough, I hope, to be too late.’

“ ‘It is never too late for a man,’ replied I, ‘to own that he has been in the wrong, or to say thank you. But, as far as I am concerned, do not talk of pardon for a moment, Mr. Russell; you spoke hastily and bitterly at the time, and thought yourself aggrieved. Let the whole matter be forgotten and blotted out, as not worth remembering. And as for thanks, I deserve none. Your real friend is the young lady who so bravely set to work when everybody else had given you up; it is to her

you owe what little I could do—to her, in fact, you owe your life.’

“‘I know it,’ he answered, ‘I know it well. I have tried to thank her as she deserves; but she will have it that all the praise is due to you, Mr. Fairleigh; and that, as a man of honour, I was bound to come and thank you myself.’

“‘Just like her, Mr. Russell,’ said I, ‘everybody to be thanked rather than Miss Jennie Moreton. But try to thank her once more as she deserves, and, perhaps, you may succeed this time. Faint-heart, you know—I need not finish the proverb, I think, to a sailor.’”

“Upon my word,” interrupts Hester at this point, “upon my word, sir, you make pretty free with young ladies’ affections, and, I must say, are not too severe upon this idle ——”

“My dear!” replies Fairleigh, “he is a reformed character. A woman, when she once

gets hold of a man of this kind, can turn him round her finger. He will go to sea—he *is* going to sea, as I afterwards found out in talking to him—and will come back a new man. It was of no use to do the thing by halves, and so I made it up with the poor wretch—out and out—till at last, my dear, he became so amiable that I invited him to come upstairs and see his old friend, Mrs. Fairleigh.”

“How dare you tell such shameful, wicked stories, Henry!” says Hester, with sparkling eyes.

“Every word true, Hussy. I did really ask him, and you would have been angry enough if I had not. ‘You ought to see her,’ said I, ‘and thank her for sending me to Exeter.’ But that was more than he could stand.”

“‘No, no,’ he answered, as I shook hands with him, ‘I cannot face my old friend Miss Hester just at present; but I thank

you all the same for asking me to do so. Tell her, I hope that we shall meet some day when I'm not ashamed to look her in the face.'

"And so, my dear Mrs. Fairleigh, your friend and I parted on the most friendly terms ; and he went down the hill, whistling gaily, as a jolly, young sailor should, when wind and tide are in his favour."

"But is he in earnest?"

"Well, as much as he ever was, I fancy—perhaps more so. He has had his whistle, and paid pretty dearly for it ; and now has won the heart of a woman, whose little finger is worth more than his whole body ; perhaps he will try to grow worthy of her."

"You said just now, sir, that he was a reformed character."

"My dear, I forgot, quite forgot for the moment it was your old pet that I was speaking of. He *is* reformed, of course."

"No pet of mine," interrupted Hester,

“no pet of mine or of Jennie’s; but an old friend that I could not see going to ruin without a thought of old times, when——”

“When the grave, elderly barrister had not appeared on the scene, Hussy. Quite right, too—quite right, my darling, to stand up for an old friend. But, joking apart, it must have cost the fellow a hard pang to come here and eat humble-pie as he has done; and, I think, he really meant what he said. And so we will wish him a fair wind and a good ship; in which latter point I may, perhaps, be able to help him, for I still know some people in the Sydney trade, and they may give him a berth, if all else fails. There! will that satisfy my little wife?”

“More than satisfy her, dearest,” replied Hester, as, with eyes once more sparkling with tears of pleasure, she set about unpacking her box of books. “It is just like your

own, generous, dear self, and you deserve a kiss for being so good."

The kiss was duly paid, and the recipient seemed not at all averse to prompt payment.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. GRUNDY.

THE bailiff's cottage, where Miss Fairleigh had taken up her abode, was away at the remoter part of the estate, and since their marriage neither Hester nor her husband had once seen the occupant. She still entirely disapproved of the match, and intended to signify her disapproval in the most marked manner. She had never called at the Manor-house, and now made no secret of her intention not to call—unless, as she phrased it, it should please Providence to make her poor brother a widower, which she trusted Providence would be slow to do."

"My dear," said Fairleigh to his wife one day, as they strolled back from Lipscombe, "the old lady has set up her back, and is

visiting us with her heaviest displeasure. What do you say to defying Mrs. Grundy, and boldly invading the enemy's camp?"

"What, by calling on her before she has called on us? Impossible, Henry; charmed as I should be to make her acquaintance."

"My dear, I know it's sinning against the light—a clear defiance of all the known rules of society, but she's an old woman, or rather an old goose, and she is my sister, who lived with me for more years than she will care to own."

"How self-willed you are this morning," replies Hester, with a pretty air of authority.

"I am, Hussy. It's the east wind; that always makes me perverse. Don't let it infect you."

"I see," she said, "that you mean to get your own way, as usual."

Then for a few hundred yards she walked on in silence; but when they got to the Cross-roads, Hester quietly took the path to

the Cottage, with that happy smile on her face which it always wore when she gave her husband pleasure.

When they got within sight of the house they observed a gentleman leave it, and walk hastily away by another path which led to the Manor-house, and soon took him out of sight among the trees.

"It's Paul Pry himself, Hussy. Cudlip told me a month ago that he was getting very regular in his visits to the Cottage. What in the world is the old man aiming at now?"

"He was always a favourite of Miss Fairleigh's, so I've heard you say. A new *Ear-wash*, perhaps?"

"He would never get a farthing out of Sarah for any such quackery. No, no; he is flying at higher game."

When they reached the Cottage there was no need to ask if the mistress was at home, for there she stood, in garden-hat and gloves, cutting a bouquet of flowers. The

sound of footsteps on the gravel-path made her start, and turn hastily round, to find herself face to face with the guilty couple.

“Sarah, my dear, Mrs. Fairleigh and I could stand it no longer, and so we have come to take you by storm. Why, your carnations beat the Manor-house all to nothing.”

Miss Sarah received them with a stately curtsy that almost froze poor Hester. But the ice was now fairly broken ;—the old lady could not withstand the bright, genial sunshine of her young visitor’s manner, and in spite of herself, soon began to thaw. Among the flowers Hester was at once at home, and she there made herself so pleasantly busy, praised so judiciously, and arranged a little bouquet with such charming skill, that in a few minutes the trio were chatting away like old friends.

Then followed cake and wine in the drawing-room, a small, square apartment,

decked out in the neatest, but most precise fashion. A round table, adorned with six books, all arranged at the severest angles of propriety ; six little chairs, each fixed in its own special place ; and every article of furniture looking as if "touch not, handle not" were stamped on its face. But Hester endured it all bravely, and was as bright and pleasant indoors as out.

Her husband, with a smile of content on his face, for a time bore himself humbly as a conqueror should, but soon broke out in his usual fashion.

"Sarah, my dear, I must congratulate you on your blooming appearance to-day ; you really seem to grow younger and younger, and look as if my old prophecy had come true, and 'Mr. Sutable' had appeared on the scene, and threatened violent measures. We saw a gentleman escape in haste, as we came up to the house ; was he the happy swain ?"

A slight flush passed over the lady's cheek at these words, as she replied with unusual vivacity—

“Your husband has not lost his old trick of joking, I see, Mrs. Fairleigh, and will not allow me the privilege of seeing an old friend without a taste of quizzing. Poor Mr. Roper!”

“*Poor* Mr. Roper, my dear? I consider him a most fortunate man: the owner of a ‘*Golden Auriphonic*,’ and a prosperous newspaper, and a favourite visitor at the house of a most charming maiden lady. What more can he desire?”

“How you rattle on Henry! As it happens, now, he has disposed of ‘*The Auriphonic*,’ and is thinking of getting rid of the *Gazette*; while as to his visits here, it is by the merest chance that he happened to drop in, just before your arrival.”

“Better and better,” replied Fairleigh. “Sold the Ear-wash, has he? what a lucky

dog! He has only to get rid of the *Gazette*, and his fortune is made—just in time to look round among his host of fair admirers, and settle down in happiness for life. It's an awful pity he is not a foot or two taller."

"Taller!" exclaims Hester, in her most innocent voice; "what can his height possibly have to do with his happiness?"

"Everything, Mrs. Fairleigh—everything. Suppose that the idol of his affections is five feet high " (Miss Sarah was near six), "and in the ardour of his confession he is tempted to snatch a kiss from the lips of his beloved, how will three feet ever reach them? He will have to get on a chair, or she must lift him up to the height of his ambition,—

'And clasp him with her snowy arms
To bring the longed-for boon in reach.' "

"You are quite incorrigible, sir," says Hester, with a merry laugh. "Mr. Roper is not such a dwarf as all that, and——"

“For my part,” interrupts the lady of the house, “I never observed anything so peculiar in Mr. Roper’s stature ; and as to three feet, it is absurd, Henry—quite absurd !”

“Bravo, Sarah, bravo !” cries her tormentor. “He has made the attempt, and not failed. My dear sister, I *must* congratulate you, and I shall look out for an early call from the happy man, and be ready to make most liberal arrangements.”

Then, with a hearty laugh, he shook hands with his hostess, and wished her good-bye, whispering, as he went, his old quotation into Hester’s ear—

“Even at threescore Belinda felt the smart
Of Love’s inevitable dart.”

No sooner were they fairly out of the house than he began again—

“She will never forgive you for making fun of her in this dreadful manner,” says Hester.

“My dear child, she enjoys it now, because she knows it is true—a downright sober fact. The poor little man saw us coming, and got out of our way, depend on it. These little men always go in for tall women, and he will rule her with a rod of iron ; and she, poor old goose, will enjoy being ruled, unless he’s very naughty, in which case she may put him on the mantle-piece until he begs her pardon !”

It was lucky for them that Miss Sarah did not hear the hearty laugh which every now and then broke out amidst pleasantries of this kind, that lasted all the way home to the Manor-house ; and even continued while they were dressing for dinner.

“Fancy, Hussy—only fancy that little dumpling of a man marrying a thin, bony spinster of six feet. A bony wife, of all awful prizes in the great lottery, the most awful.”

“Mr. Fairleigh,” says Hester, in her

gravest voice, "I consider your present style of talk highly improper and objectionable."

And then, still smiling in spite of her assumed gravity, she took his arm, and went down to dinner, where the presence of the servants hardly restrained the master of the house from carrying on a string of covert jokes and small witticisms on the strange event of the day, that convulsed his wife with laughter, and completely puzzled the domestics.

"Master was going on to that degree," said the girl who helped to wait—to cook in the kitchen—"that missis was 'most a-busten all dinner-time, about some giantess he sin, I believe, at the Fair."

But, in spite of all joking, Fairleigh's shrewd guess was a true one ; and little Sam Roper was the accepted suitor of Miss Sarah, at the Cottage.

CHAPTER XIII.

EPILOGUE.

GOOD intentions avail a good deal, but they did not avail to get a ship for the late mate of the *Lapwing*. Captains fought shy of him, and owners asked perplexing questions as to his antecedents. Months thus passed away—months that had to be spent more or less in idleness, and discontent that began to savour of despair. He was all but penniless, and could get no employment; the townspeople looked coldly on him; and to the Editor of the *Gazette* he was beholden even for food and lodging.

But this state of things soon reached Fairleigh's ears, and he, with his usual generosity, set to work on Russell's behalf.

The end of his negotiations was that the young sailor was at last appointed second mate on board the *Rainbow*, a fine barque trading to Sydney, then just ready for her first voyage.

Russell had seen Jennie but once since the day of his visit to the Manor-house. It was a hurried interview, but sufficed for him to tell her all that happened, and to elicit her warm and willing praise.

“You have kept your word, Tom,” she said, “and I will be true to mine. But don’t talk or dream of marriage at present, for it is utterly out of the question. I have proved my love for you pretty plainly, but nothing shall induce me to be your wife till you come back, after a full voyage, with a new character, and a ‘fresh log,’ as you call it, which the Captain will care to see and approve of.”

From this determination neither entreaties, nor grumbling, nor threats availed to move

her ; and at last her importunate lover had to be content.

“ I will see you once more before you go ; but don't come again until you have got a ship, and are ready to start.”

One more interview followed, therefore, when the *Rainbow* was about to sail, and then came a last “ good-bye.”

She bore it bravely—bravely as a true, loving woman will bear all for the man she loves ; and was outwardly bright and cheery to the last, though her heart beat sadly enough at the thought of his long and inevitable absence.

“ Jennie,” he said at last, “ you fairly shame me with your bright and happy face and hopeful words. But my voyage shall be no shame to you, and I *will* come back—if I ever come—with a ‘ fresh log.’ If ever a man was true to his sweetheart, I'll be true to you, my darling. I swear it.”

“ I don't much care for swearing, or loud

words," she answered, in a broken voice; "all I want is work and truth. I am sure you will live to come home again. Remember you have a woman's life and happiness in your hands. I trust you once more. And now—go—go, while I have strength and heart to bid you; and God's blessing rest on you, and with the *Rainbow*."

And then, after one long, loving kiss, they parted; and two years passed away before they met again.

During those two years many things happened which need not, and cannot, be told here. Jennie passed much of her time at the Manor-house, where a little owner for the tiny socks had in due time appeared, to the infinite joy of the young mother, now dearer than ever to her husband, and more graciously winning in her beauty and pride as a mother. In other respects Hester was little changed; and, in her

own supreme happiness, she had always a word of comfort and sunshine for all who needed it.

“You live on *Hope*, Jennie,” she said ; “and he is on board the *Rainbow* ; don’t heed the drops of rain, my dear, for the sun must and will shine out at last.”

Letters, too, from the wanderer came now and then, and brought home tidings as good as could be wished—fair weather and rough, rough and fair ; but plenty of work, and a prosperous voyage ; the “skipper” content, and, homeward bound, not far off.

The carnations in the cottage garden now bloomed more famously than ever, for they had the watchful care of both master and mistress. The *Gazette* had not changed hands, for the simple reason that Roper could not find a purchaser. But he had given up the bulk of the work to a sub-editor, and spent most of his time in his garden ; over a quiet rubber with his wife at the Manor-

house, or cribbage with his old friend the Captain. He left off gossiping, and took to the calmer and safer solace of a pipe of tobacco—chiefly in a snug summer-house, built by his own hands, in the garden—more rarely by the kitchen-fire, as Mrs. Roper objects to the Nicotian odour in her small domains. In this one point he wisely yields to the *genus loci*, but in all respects fully holds his own. His majestic Sarah makes him an admirable wife; and, in spite of a little tendency to worship Mrs. Grundy, and enact innumerable small rules for every member and article in her household, finds her greatest happiness in his comfort and well-being.

No little socks are being knitted at the Cottage, nor is there any probability of such work, except for the young master at the Manor-house.

The Captain wears well for a man of sixty, but his hair has grown more and more silvery

of late, and his visits to the cliff feebler and fewer than of old. But half-pay is a word he hates, and he won't hear of retiring until "my Lords" shall be pleased to give him a hint.

For a long time he held out stubbornly against all mention of the *Rainbow* at the Rosery, but the enemy, he says, mounted too many guns for him, and raked him fore and aft.

"If the fellow," he adds, "doesn't turn out a lubber after all, he will have nobody to thank but the woman who stuck to him in all weathers, and saved the ship from the breakers by downright pluck and good seamanship."

After this little manifestation, he hawls down his flag and surrenders.

But we are bound to add that when the *Rainbow* returned from her first voyage she brought home with her no lubber as first mate, but a smart, active, clever officer,

with rather too much go in him for a sober captain, but a great favourite with the crew.

"The fust mate," they used to say, "was never hard upon a poor devil when he got into a scrape ; and if so be there was a loop-hole, he always kep' it open."

His first visit was straight to the Rosery, where he at once took the Captain by storm.

"I'm no great hand," he said "Captain Langley, at palavering, but I have turned over a new leaf, and mean to keep the book open at that page straight to the end. If you can make me welcome, I'm a new man, with new hopes and a new life before me. If not——"

"*If not ?*" says the Captain ; "hold hard there ; don't you see that the Admiral," pointing to Jennie, as he spoke, "is making signals for you to come aboard ? Answer the signals, man ; you know what

‘England expects.’ I’ll be off on another tack.”

“God bless you, Jennie, for waiting so long.”

“Who told you it was long, sir? Wasn’t the Admiral, after all, worth waiting for? Did the two years go so slowly on board the *Rainbow*?”

“My darling, they were like centuries.”

“Ah! here on shore the days went swiftly enough, because hope was like sunshine to me, and love kept alive the flame.”

A month later, the marriage-bells rang for Jennie Moreton, and the happy sailor whom she had won back from ruin. But in spite of all their happiness, she was as determined as ever, and insisted on the bridegroom’s joining his ship on her very next voyage.

He will go out as first mate; and then come back and settle down for a year or two at the Rosery, and talk over past

voyages with the Captain. Some day, no doubt, he will tell the true story of the run at Sandy Cove, which the old man has never been able to clear up. As yet, even Jennie is ignorant of it.

THE END.

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and titles, including "The Hon. Mr. Justice" and "The Hon. Mr. Justice".

